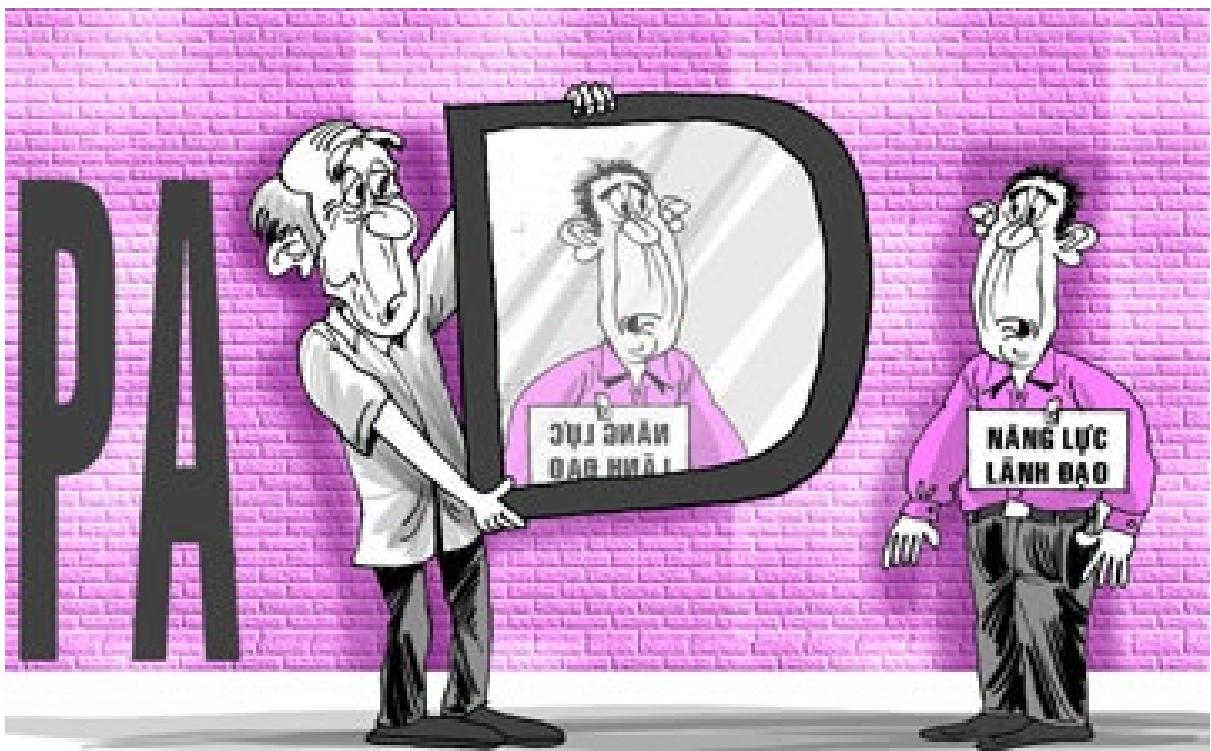# Mid-Term Review

The Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) Research and Advocacy Programme
(November 2019 - October 2023)

Elinor Bajraktari and Phạm Quang Nam

November 2023

"All our knowledge has its origin in our perceptions."
Leonardo da Vinci

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project/outcome title: The Vietnam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI)

Quantum ID: 00100002

Corporate outcome and output:

CPD Output 3.2 [primary]: Improved mechanisms for promoting transparency, public participation, integrity, adaptability and accountability, including participation of women and other vulnerable groups.

CPD Output 3.4 [secondary]: Capacities strengthened to undertake legal, policy and institutional reforms to address structural barriers to gender equality and inclusion of persons with disability.

Country:Viet Nam

Region: RBAP

Date project document signed: November 2017

Project Start Date: November 2017

Project Planned End Date: December 2025

Project budget: USD 12,103,509

Funding source (for 2023 funding): DFAT, Irish Aid

Implementing party: UNDP

EVALUATION INFORMATION

Type of Evaluation: Mid-Term Evaluation

Evaluation Start Date: August 2023

Evaluation End Date: November 2023

Evaluators: Elinor Bajraktari and Phạm Quang Nam

Executive Summary

This report presents the main findings of the mid-term review (MTR) of the "*Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index Research and Advocacy Programme*" (also referred to as the *PAPI Initiative*), financed by Australia and Ireland, and implemented by UNDP. The MTR assessed the initiative's achievements in terms of its relevance, effectiveness, coherence, efficiency, sustainability, and other cross-cutting themes, and provides recommendations for the PAPI team and UNDP for the further implementation of this initiative and the design of similar programmes in the future. The MTR methodology was based on mixed methods and involved the use of commonly applied evaluation tools such as documentary review, interviews, survey, information triangulation, analysis and synthesis. Field work and observation was conducted in three provinces by a national consultant in September 2023. The evaluation team also conducted interviews with project partners at the national and provincial level, civil society organizations, UNDP, project team, other UN agencies, representatives of Australia and Ireland, and other partners. An online survey was organized with all the members of the initiative's Technical Advisory Board. The MTR generated a wealth of findings and several recommendations which are summarized in the rest of this section.

Relevance

PAPI's relevance is warranted by the important role it plays in enhancing government effectiveness and accountability at the provincial level by generating citizen-driven data and research on public administration. PAPI's comprehensive ecosystem of data, research, and advocacy initiatives informs policy reforms across governance dimensions like transparency, participation, and service delivery. PAPI's strength lies in its rigorous methodology, adaptability to emerging issues, multi-stakeholder usefulness, and alignment with national and UN frameworks. By empowering citizens, guiding authorities, and fostering collaborative partnerships, PAPI makes wide-ranging contributions to good governance, inclusion, and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals in Vietnam.

Effectiveness and Impact

The PAPI initiative demonstrates effectiveness through its sound conceptual framework, rigorous methodology, and well-structured execution process. PAPI leverages a robust sampling strategy and transparent scoring system to generate high-quality data. While data collection risks occasional interference, the PAPI team uses stringent protocols to safeguard integrity. PAPI's annual reports, thematic research, provincial workshops, and sustained media engagement enable evidence-based advocacy for governance reforms. By catalyzing policy dialogue, PAPI has contributed to transparency, accountability, and inclusion. However, its results framework could better articulate PAPI's theory of change and shift focus from outputs to outcomes. Augmenting indicators to capture stakeholder impact will strengthen results measurement.

In the last 15 years, PAPI has made significant contributions by pioneering data-driven governance assessments in Vietnam. PAPI provides significant value through its comprehensive measurement and research of provincial governance, enabling performance benchmarking and accountability. The information generated by PAPI is utilized by diverse stakeholders - from citizens to government institutions to international partners - for advocacy, planning, research and reform.

Coherence

PAPI's strong internal coherence is enabled by its well-structured methodology and clear division of responsibilities among the implementing partners. Its vast 15-year dataset enables rich longitudinal analysis of governance trends. Externally, PAPI operates among a range of specialized governance surveys, necessitating greater coordination. Within UNDP's portfolio, PAPI can serve as an integrating platform, with its diagnostics guiding complementary programming for localized governance improvements. Enhanced internal and external coherence will further consolidate PAPI's position in Vietnam's evolving governance landscape.

Efficiency

PAPI shows good operational efficiency through its well-structured process, clear division of responsibilities, and streamlined timelines. Its execution has benefitted from diverse expertise from UNDP, research entities, and international consultants. An Advisory Board validates findings, ensuring methodological rigor. Key risks

like the increasingly restrictive civic space require contingency plans to safeguard the initiative's independence. With a 96% budget execution rate, PAPI has maximized resources to deliver a unique, localized tool for data-driven governance reforms. Its grassroots focus, regular updates, and attention to inclusion underscore a strong value proposition.

Sustainability

With 15 years of experience, PAPI has demonstrated strong sustainability and impact in Vietnam's evolving governance landscape. This is due to several key factors. Political will from the authorities and enabling legal provisions to have allowed PAPI to operate and promote transparency and public participation at the provincial level. The committed core team of UNDP, CECODES, RTA and the two international advisers has provided stability, integrity and adaptability. The rigorous methodology has ensured data accuracy and credibility. Inclusivity, especially regarding women and persons with disabilities, aligns with emerging priorities. Sustained awareness building and adequate financing have been essential. While national ownership would enhance integration, UNDP stewardship currently best balances this with the crucial needs for independence.

Crosscutting Themes

PAPI aligns with human rights principles through its focus on participation, accountability, and inclusion of marginalized groups like women, migrants, minorities, and persons with disabilities. However, more research on gender disparities and human rights reporting could further women's empowerment and rights promotion. Adding e-governance and environment dimensions bolsters PAPI's relevance amid digitization and climate change. Overall, PAPI increasingly employs a rights-based approach centered on amplifying diverse voices and meeting the needs of vulnerable populations. Its data diagnostics paired with technical assistance spearhead inclusive, sustainable governance reforms at provincial and national levels.

Going Forward

This review advocates for PAPI's continued operation under UNDP's management, recognizing its indispensable role in ensuring data integrity and advocating for governance reforms in Vietnam. While national ownership is a long-term goal, transferring management poses risks presently. PAPI should maintain its expanded scope as a research and advocacy platform to fully catalyze policy improvements. With a proven model and tangible impacts, PAPI merits ongoing support from Australia, Ireland and other partners interested in spearheading data-driven, transparent governance. By safeguarding PAPI's independence and funding, while strategically expanding its engagement and influence, PAPI's impact can be further enhanced.

Recommendations

One overarching recommendation provided by this evaluation that applies to all the parties involved with PAPI is that ***UNDP should maintain PAPI's management for the foreseeable future to balance national ownership and independence***.

High-priority Recommendations

The following are recommendations directly relevant to the PAPI Team.

1. PAPI team should develop a *sounder results framework*, transitioning from an output-focused approach, such as the mere number of reports or events, to a results-oriented one that measures tangible effects on governance improvements.

2. The PAPI team should *simplify the language and formats* used in PAPI and thematic reports without compromising the analytical quality. This will make PAPI's insights and messages more accessible and comprehensible to general audiences and enhance impact.

3. PAPI team should actively seek avenues to further *integrate PAPI's insights and evidence into existing national policy frameworks* and governmental planning/review processes. By bringing PAPI closer to internal oversight systems, its impact will be ingrained into the iterative process of policy formulation and review, moving beyond its current role as an external assessment. In addition, PAPI team should organize *regular policy dialogues* that include a diverse range of stakeholders such as academics, policymakers, and

civil society organizations. These forums could be utilized to dissect complex policy issues, using PAPI's empirical evidence as a basis for targeted interventions. PAPI team should continue and expand the recent practice of *complementary research and advocacy* that goes beyond mere assessment to propose tailored community-level solutions for specific localities. The team should promote complementary research that identifies good practices from high performing provinces that can be replicated across Vietnam.

4. PAPI team should explore options to engage more actively in creating avenues for the *empowerment of women*. This could include leadership training programmes, mentoring networks with existing female officials, and media campaigns specifically designed to build confidence and encourage political participation among women.

5. PAPI team could also intensify *partnerships with civil society and other relevant stakeholders* to leverage PAPI data for targeted advocacy campaigns promoting gender equality, especially for LGBTIQ+ inclusion, in provinces. As PAPI works towards inclusive governance, the promotion of the *participation and inclusion of LGBTIQ+ in local governance* should be a priority to build on what has been done in 2023. Also, in preparation for 2026 Elections, the promotion of women in politics, including representatives of women with disabilities, should be continued as a focus in PAPI advocacy activities towards 2026.

6. PAPI team has an opportunity to *expand the provision of specialized training* and capacity building for provincial government departments, especially in key sectors such as health and education, to effectively interpret and utilize PAPI data for sectoral strategies, planning and budgeting. A focused effort should be made to incorporate PAPI findings and research into local authorities' annual planning and budgeting processes, thus facilitating more targeted governance reforms. The team explore collaborative capacity building with agencies like the Departments of Home Affairs.

7. The PAPI team should *further partnerships with media and journalists* to produce in-depth reports that utilize PAPI's granular data to advocate for reforms in local-level governance. The PAPI team should *increase the turnover of regular PAPI-based content* (op-eds, policy briefs) for dissemination across print, broadcast and digital media to expand public awareness The PAPI team should *offer customized data analytics support to media outlets* to strengthen reporting on local governance issues.

The following are recommendations directly relevant to the UNDP Country Office.

- UNDP should leverage PAPI's data and research more effectively as a *foundational tool for UNDP's projects* related to local-level governance. This implies not only integrating PAPI data and research into existing initiatives, but also developing new, targeted interventions around PAPI findings to address identified governance challenges and needs at the provincial level. For example, if PAPI data or research reveals inefficiencies in service delivery in healthcare, a new UNDP initiative could focus on improving healthcare in that specific locality. Furthermore, new projects could be designed with results frameworks that are intrinsically aligned with PAPI's outcome-oriented metrics.

- UNDP should identify and *engage high-level champions* within VFF, MPI, MOHA, National Assembly and other Party/State agencies to secure stronger political backing. UNDP should proactively build a closer rapport with the VFF leadership for greater support for PAPI at higher levels. UNDP should continue to *engage the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics* to contribute academic insights and disseminate PAPI through high-level official training. UNDP should explore an *expanded role for MPI* as a champion of PAPI to further institutionalize it in Vietnam's policy landscape.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AUD - Australian Dollar

CAPD - Can Tho Association of Persons with Disabilities

CECODES - Centre for Community Support and Development Studies

CEPEW - Center for Education Promotion and Empowerment of Women

COVID-19 - Coronavirus Disease 2019

CPII - Citizen Powered Innovation Initiative

CRT - Center for Research and Training

CSO - Civil Society Organization

DFAT - Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade

DOHA - Department of Home Affairs

ECUE - Not specified, presumed to be an organization acronym.

EUR – Euro

HCMA - Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics

HRBA - Human Rights Based Approach

IT - Information Technology

LGBTIQ+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Questioning, and Plus

MDRI - Mekong Development Research Institute

MOHA - Ministry of Home Affairs

MPI - Ministry of Planning and Investment

MTR - Mid-Term Review

NGOs - Non-Governmental Organizations

OBI - Open Budget Index

PAPI - Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index

PAR-Index - Public Administration Reform Index

PCI - Provincial Competitiveness Index

POBI - Provincial Open Budget Index

PwDs - Persons with Disabilities

RTA - Real Time Analytics

SDGs - Sustainable Development Goals

SIPAS - Service Delivery Performance Index System

UN - United Nations

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

USD - United States Dollar

VFD - Vietnam Federation on Disability
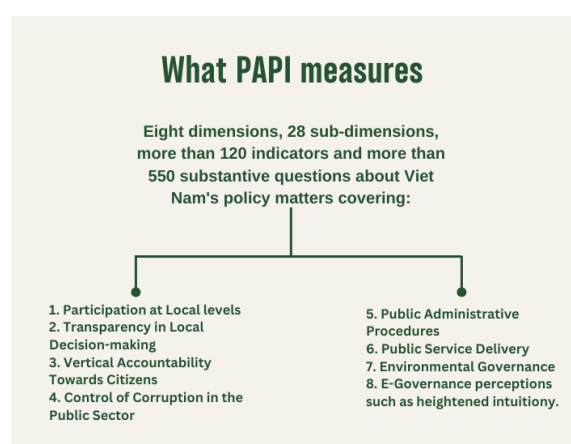
VFF - Vietnam Fatherland Front

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Project Context

As Vietnam transitions from a low middle-income country, it faces a complex set of social, economic, and institutional challenges that require transformative solutions. In this dynamic environment, the need for robust, evidence-based policymaking has never been more critical. Transparency and access to information stand as essential pillars for maintaining public trust and fostering an open and equitable business climate. Moreover, as the ultimate beneficiaries and end-users of public services and policies, citizens are increasingly demanding higher standards of effectiveness, transparency, and accountability from public systems. These expectations extend to the need for public agencies to be responsive to evolving societal norms, open to critical dialogues for reform, and agile in implementing improvements. Additionally, there is a growing call for the public sector to be proactive in promoting equitable development, enabling public participation in decision-making, and empowering citizen-led oversight and monitoring mechanisms. These principles are engrained in the Vietnamese constitution, which says "All state agencies, cadres, officials and employees must show respect for the People, devotedly serve the People, maintain close contact with the People, listen to their opinions and submit to their supervision; resolutely struggle against corruption, wastefulness and all manifestations of bureaucracy, arrogance and authoritarianism" (Article 8).

To assist Vietnam in tracking these challenges and suggesting where the country should focus its energy and resources, since 2009, the research project "the Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI)" has been commissioned by UNDP in Vietnam together with the Centre for Community Support and Development Studies (CECODES) and different agencies within the Vietnam Fatherland Front agencies (with the latest VFF partner being the Centre for Research and Training of the Vietnam Fatherland Front). Since 2012, UNDP in Vietnam has partnered with the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (HCMA) in disseminating PAPI findings to provincial leaders through action-based research and policy advice. Over the years, especially since 2018, the PAPI research and advocacy programme has expanded to include after-PAPI-data research and development initiatives and activities that fall under Outputs 3 and 5. As a result, the PAPI programme has been delivered by UNDP in Vietnam in collaboration with a number of central and local government agencies, national non-government organizations, research institutions and social impact businesses.

1.2. Project Description

What PAPI measures

Eight dimensions, 28 sub-dimensions, more than 120 indicators and more than 550 substantive questions about Viet Nam's policy matters covering:

1. Participation at Local levels
2. Transparency in Local Decision-making
3. Vertical Accountability Towards Citizens
4. Control of Corruption in the Public Sector

5. Public Administrative Procedures
6. Public Service Delivery
7. Environmental Governance
8. E-Governance perceptions such as heightened intuitiony.

The PAPI Research and Advocacy Programme (herein referred to as the PAPI initiative) is a long-running UNDP initiative that generates information to improve the performance of local governments in meeting citizens' needs by: (i) enabling citizens to benchmark their local government's performance and advocate for improvement; and (ii) creating constructive competition and promoting learning among local authorities. PAPI puts citizens at the heart of Viet Nam's development. As 'end users' of public administration and public services,

they are fully capable of assessing the performance of State and local authorities and supporting the State in establishing institutions that are "of the people, by the people and for the people." The PAPI project aims to benefit citizens, central and local governments, elected bodies, mass organisations, the media, and the international community in Vietnam and abroad.

PAPI THE VIET NAM PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PERFORMANCE INDEX

AIMS

To generate information that can improve the performance of local governments in meeting their citizens' needs by:
- Enabling citizens to benchmark their local government's performance and advocate for improvement
- Promoting self-reflection for improvement, creating constructive competition, and promoting learning among local authorities

APPROACH

Citizens are at the heart of Viet Nam's development. As "end users" of public administration and public services, they are fully capable of assessing the performance of central and local authorities and of supporting establishment of a State "of the people, by the people and for the people
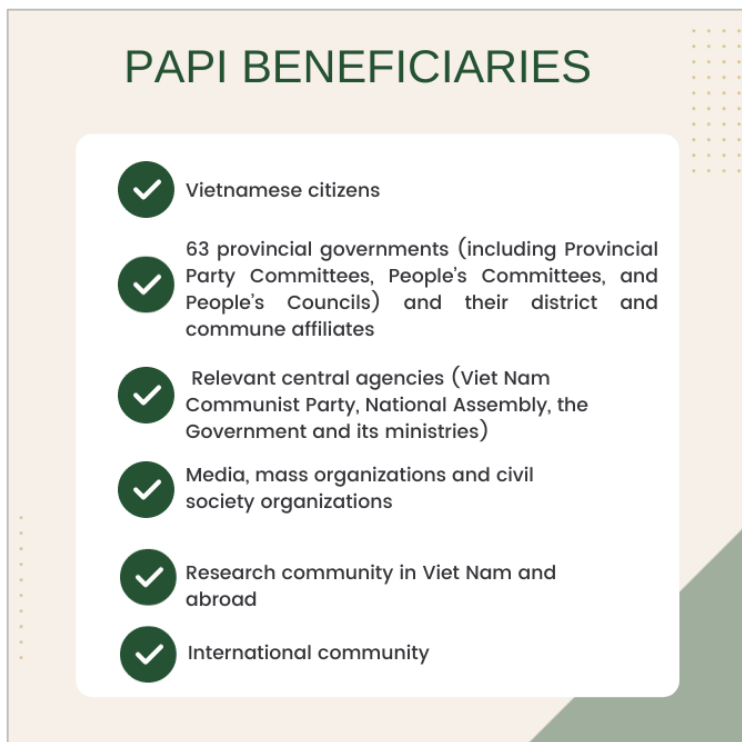
The PAPI survey was piloted in three provinces in 2009 and then expanded for a larger pilot in 30 selected provinces in 2010. With the success of the pilots, the PAPI survey was replicated for the first time and scaled up to all 63 provinces since 2011 to be the first-ever mass survey of citizens in Viet Nam. Since then, the survey has been iterated every year.

In the 15 years of its existence, PAPI has contributed to improving local governance and promoting inclusive governance. After funding from the Government of Spain (2009-2010) and the Government of Switzerland (2011-2017), the PAPI project has been further funded by the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) until 2025 and the Embassy of Ireland until possibly 2027. The project has now expanded to cover two additional components, i.e., Citizen Powered Innovation Initiative and Person with Disability Inclusive Governance with the major additional contribution from DFAT. Since 2018, gender equity promotion activities, focussing on women's and LGBTIQ's participation in politics and governance have been added to PAPI with major funding from the Embassy of Ireland.

PAPI has become the largest annual citizen-centric, nationwide policy monitoring tool. Over the past 15 years, PAPI has collected the views of 178,243 randomly selected citizens about the country's performance in governance and public administration in various sectors, based on their direct interactions with local governments. In 2022 alone, 16,117 respondents, including migrants, shared their reflections based on interactions with public authorities over the past year. In addition, to date, every province has hosted or convened a PAPI diagnostic workshop. All 63 provinces have issued action plans, directives, official letters

and/or resolutions to request that local government agencies respond to citizen feedback obtained through PAPI. The PAPI reports and data have been used extensively by government agencies, development partners, civil society organizations, the media and researchers. The PAPI data has also promoted innovation from provinces of Tay Ninh, Ha Giang and Quang Tri through the Citizen Powered Innovation Initiative.

PAPI BENEFICIARIES

- ✓ Vietnamese citizens
- ✓ 63 provincial governments (including Provincial Party Committees, People's Committees, and People's Councils) and their district and commune affiliates
- ✓ Relevant central agencies (Viet Nam Communist Party, National Assembly, the Government and its ministries)
- ✓ Media, mass organizations and civil society organizations
- ✓ Research community in Viet Nam and abroad
- ✓ International community

PAPI generates information about the actual performance of local authorities in meeting the expanding needs and expectations of citizens. By doing so, PAPI promotes self-reflection for improvement, creates constructive competition, and promotes learning among local authorities. In addition, PAPI acts as a rigorous and objective platform that allows citizens to benchmark their local government's performance and advocate for improvements in different aspects of governance and public administration; aspects that are evolving as Vietnam further develops economically and socially. PAPI also contributes to expectations that the governments at all levels will be more open and responsive to the feedback and expectations of citizens. The vast range of PAPI beneficiaries is illustrated in the figure on the right.

The box below summarizes the initiative's Theory of Change, which illustrates how the PAPI team converts inputs into activities and outputs, which in turn generate outcomes and impact at the national level.

Box 1: Project's Theory of Change

The project's Theory of Change outlines a comprehensive framework for how the project's activities aim to contribute to good governance at the local level. It is based on the following key elements:

Inputs:

1. Multi-stakeholder engagement (UNDP, CECODES, VFF, international experts, and local agencies)

2. Research expertise and data collection resources

3. Annual financial investment for research and dissemination

4. International and in-house methodological guidance

5. A structured 9-step approach that encompasses the full public policy research process.

Activities:

1.   Refinement of Methodology and Questionnaires

2.   Execution of Field Surveys across 63 provinces

3.   Data Analysis and Validation by the National Advisory Board

4.   Report Writing

5.   Dissemination through various channels, including provincial workshops, national launches, and media coverage

6.   Policy Dialogues with government and non-government stakeholders

7.   Action research on focus themes to look into PAPI's identified policy-practice gaps and provide technical advice to central and local government agencies;

8.   Technical support to provinces to promote citizen-centric innovation initiatives;

9.   Communication and advocacy for inclusive governance to reach the furthest behind (ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities and migrants), and for gender equity (women in politics and LGBTIQ+ inclusion).

Outputs:

1.   Annual PAPI reports incorporating thematic diagnostics.

2.   Action plans and resolutions from 63 provinces

3.   Data-driven recommendations for policy change

4.   High-level training modules for government and Party leaders

5.   Diagnostic workshops self-funded by provinces

6.   Monthly Bulletins to keep stakeholders informed.

7.   Increased media coverage both nationally and internationally

8.   Post-PAPI action research working papers and policy briefs on governance-related topics;

9.   Technical and equipment support for four provinces (Thua Thien-Hue, Ha Giang, Tay Ninh and Quang Tri);

10.   Thematic discussion events, training workshops and written articles in English and Vietnamese posted on the media to call for action to promote inclusive governance.

Intermediate Outcomes:

1.   Raised awareness and understanding of administrative performance and citizen satisfaction among policymakers.

2.   Increased capacity of local governments to self-fund and act upon PAPI findings

3.   Inclusion of PAPI metrics and methodology in high-level training and policy dialogues

4.   Generation of citizen-centric, data-driven public policy

Long-term Outcomes:

1.   Enhanced quality of public administration and governance across all levels

2.   Increased citizen satisfaction and engagement

3.   More equitable, efficient, and transparent delivery of public services

4.   More inclusive institutions and public services

Impact:

1.   Sustainable improvements in governance, resulting in an empowered citizenry and a more responsive public sector.

2.   Realization of good governance as an enabler for sustainable development, in alignment with international frameworks and national objectives

Assumptions and Risks:

1.   Sustained multi-stakeholder engagement.

2.   Continued financial and logistical support.

3.   Political will for implementing data-driven changes.

4.   Risk of data manipulation or biases, mitigated by methodological rigor and the oversight of an independent National Advisory Board

By engaging in these activities and generating these outputs, the PAPI initiative aims to foster improved governance and administrative performance, ultimately contributing to sustainable development and an empowered citizenry.
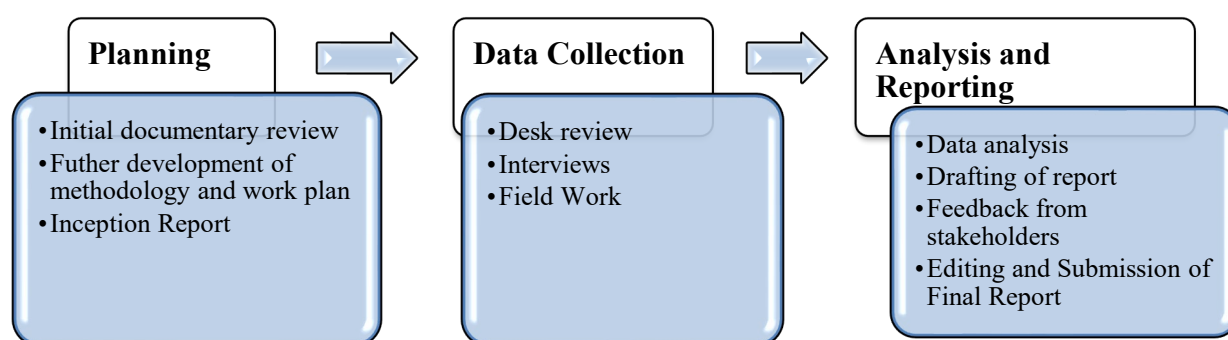
2. MTR OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

2.1. Purpose of the MTR

The overall objective of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) was to assess the achievements of the PAPI initiative in terms of its relevance, impact, effectiveness, coherence, efficiency, and sustainability, and provide recommendations for future interventions in this area. This MTR report serves as an accountability tool for the stakeholders to assess the implementation of the project, while providing specific, actionable and achievable recommendations to stakeholders in order to inform future programming.

2.2. MTR's Scope and Methodology

This MTR covers the period November 2019 to October 2023, which corresponds with the latest phase of the PAPI initiative.[1] It assessed the project's performance against the expected targets set out in the project's Results Framework and included as Annex II of this report. The scope of the MTR encompassed both outcome-level and output-level results. The MTR was conducted as per the UNDP MTR Policy.[2] It applied OECD DAC criteria and definitions and followed norms and standards established by the United Nations Evaluation Group. It was guided by the requirements set forth in UNDP's MTR toolkit, and in particular the "*Handbook on Monitoring and MTR for Development Results*"[3]. A participatory and consultative approach was used for the collection of data, formulation of recommendations and identification of lessons learned. The evaluators engaged with beneficiaries, project team and experts, UNDP Country Office, project donors and other stakeholders. The evaluators used Human Rights and Gender Equality lenses during data collection, data analysis and MTR process.[4] The MTR methodology was based on mixed methods and involved the use of commonly applied MTR tools such as documentary review, interviews, information triangulation, analysis and synthesis. MTR activities were organized according to the following phases: i) planning; ii) data collection; and iii) data analysis and reporting, as shown in the figure below.

Figure 1: MTR Phases

Planning
- Initial documentary review
- Futher development of methodology and work plan
- Inception Report

Data Collection
- Desk review
- Interviews
- Field Work

Analysis and Reporting
- Data analysis
- Drafting of report
- Feedback from stakeholders
- Editing and Submission of Final Report

MTR Planning

Project documentation was shared by the project team with the evaluators through a shared drive. The evaluators conducted a preliminary review of this documentation, as well as a preliminary evaluability analysis, which showed that the project's outputs, indicators, baselines and the available data allowed for an effective MTR. The evaluability analysis is underpinned by the MTR matrix included in Annex IV of this report.

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[1] The PAPI Research and Advocacy Programme was evaluated twice before, in 2014 and 2019.
[2] http://web.undp.org/MTR/documents/policy/2019/DP_2019_29_E.pdf
[3] Link here.
[4] http://www.unMTR.org/document/detail/980

<u>Stakeholder Analysis</u>

The MTR identified the following stakeholders and specific roles that have direct responsibilities and influence on the PAPI Research and Advocacy Programme.

- UNDP: Acts as the quality controller and main coordinator for PAPI. UNDP ensures methodological rigor and international standards are upheld, thereby contributing to the initiative's credibility and impartiality.
- Two International Experts: These academics provide invaluable methodological and analytical oversight to the PAPI initiative, thereby ensuring its intellectual rigor and international credibility.
- CECODES (Centre for Community Support and Development Studies): CECODES is deeply involved in the design, development, and dissemination of the PAPI survey, as well as in stakeholder engagement.
- RTA (Real Time Analytics): RTA collaborates with CECODES and UNDP in the survey design, data collection, and analysis phases.
- Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF): Acts as field facilitators along with VFF committees in all 63 provinces. These committees are involved in the ground-level execution of the surveys. Further, VFF's Center for Research and Training is more directly involved with the research and advocacy aspects of the PAPI initiative.
- Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (HCMA): Collaborates in research work to foster leadership engagement in governance and uses PAPI findings in academic and training settings.
- Provincial Governments: Their role is to adopt action plans and policies based on PAPI findings. They also self-fund diagnostic workshops and action plan development, thereby manifesting a high level of ownership.
- Various national research institutions and non-government organizations (NGOs): Contractors and collaborators in the research and advocacy work of the initiative.

The following are stakeholders which are indirectly related to the PAPI initiative, especially when it comes to the implementation of recommendations that emerge from the initiative.

- MOHA (Ministry of Home Affairs): Acts as a liaison between PAPI and various state institutions at the local level through the Departments of Home Affairs (DOHAs). MOHA has the potential to play a major role in facilitating the implementation of PAPI recommendations into governance reforms and public policies.
- MPI (Ministry of Planning and Investment): As a governmental agency in Vietnam responsible for state planning and investment activities, MPI plays a crucial role in policymaking and strategic planning, with significant potential for the utilization of PAPI data and research to inform and shape national development plans, policy reforms, and investment strategies. PAPI has collaborated with MPI's National Innovation Center for Local Initiatives and has provided MPI with data to report on Vietnam's achievement of SDGs in the Voluntary National Review Report.
- Academic and Research Institutions: Utilize PAPI data for scholarly articles, research papers, and to derive insights into governance models.
- Private Sector: While not directly involved in PAPI, they are end-users of the data, as governance improvements can have downstream effects on business conditions.
- Civil Society Organizations: Engage with PAPI findings to advocate for governance reforms and to assess the state of public administration.

<u>Data Collection</u>

The data collection process involved further reviewing of the project documentation and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and partners (see Table 1 for a list of data sources). It also involved a questionnaire with the project team and a country mission. As has been noted, key project documents had already been collected by the project team and were made available to the MTR team through a shared drive. Specifically, the data collection process will consist of the following components:

- *Semi-structured Interviews* – A list of stakeholders who were interviewed is provided in Table 2 below. The sampling of the interviewees was purposive, based on the list of institutions identified above and focusing on those individuals with the most engagement with PAPI activities and the most intimate knowledge of the programme. As a first step, the evaluation team identified main stakeholders involved directly with the PAPI project – they are representatives of the national government, representatives of sub-national government institutions, research and academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, the project team and experts, UNDP Country Office, the project's donors, and potential donors. The selection of the representatives of these organizations and entities was based on their relevance to and knowledge of the project – typically, each organization has a representative who is informally or formally designated as the focal point. They are individuals who have had primary responsibility for engaging with the PAPI project within each respective organization. The PAPI project team helped with the identification of these focal persons. The final list of interviewees was discussed and agreed with UNDP and the project team.

- *Online Survey* – An online survey was administered with all the members of the project's Advisory Board. The purpose of this survey was to elicit their impressions about the contributions of the PAPI survey. The sampling method for the survey was census, involving all members of the board. The survey received nine extensive responses from board members, providing an important perspective into the PAPI initiative.

- *Field Visit at the Provincial Level* – A field visit took place in September 2023 in support of the data collection process for this review. The national evaluator visited three provinces (Ha Giang, Can Tho and Ninh Thuan) to observe PAPI's work on the ground and discuss with representatives of provincial institutions the contributions and implementation of the PAPI project. These provinces are listed in the table below. Their selection was based on three criteria – a balanced distribution by geographical location, level of development, and governance context, as revealed by the PAPI survey. The interviews organized at the provincial level involved the Department of Home Affairs, Department of Information and Communication, Provincial Vietnam Fatherland Front, Provincial People's Committee, Provincial People's Council. These interviews targeted representatives of these organizations that are most knowledgeable of PAPI and who have interacted the most with the project team. Their names and contacts were provided by the project team.

Table 1: Documentary Review Sources

Sources of information

General documentation

- UNDP Strategic Plan 2021-2022
- UNDP Country Programme Document 2022-2026
- UNDAF/UNSDCF Viet Nam 2022-2026
- UN and UNDP Annual Reports
- UNDP Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures
- UNDP Handbook for Monitoring and Evaluating for Results

Project documentation

- Project Document and previous Mid-Term Reviews.
- Minutes of Steering Committee meetings.
- Annual Workplans.
- Quality Assurance Reports.
- Day to day monitoring data.
- Research reports prepared by experts.
- Annual reports.
- Interim narrative and financial reports submitted to donors.

- Monitoring and Evaluation Matrix.

Third-party reports

- Research from think tanks, NGOs, international organizations, etc.
- Provincial action plans on public administration reform.

The data collection process took into account gender considerations, ensuring that the information gathered is classified by sex and other pertinent categories. Additionally, a variety of data sources and methods were utilized to promote the inclusion of a diverse set of stakeholders, including those who are most vulnerable, when appropriate.

Data Analysis

Information obtained through the documentary review and interviewing process was triangulated against available documented sources, and then synthesized using analytical judgement. The method of triangulation is shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Triangulation Method
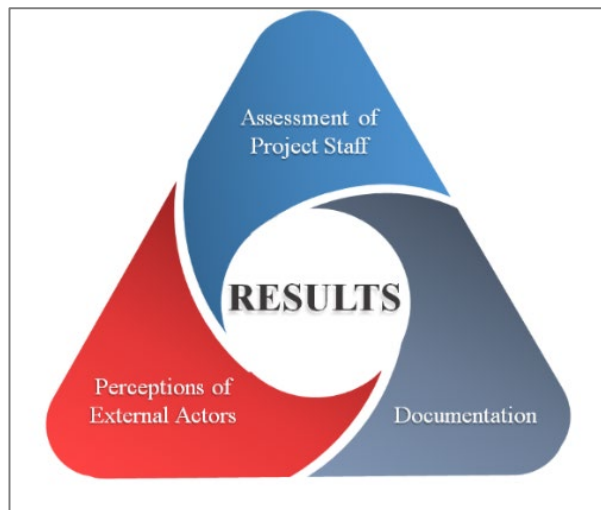
Some of the basic questions used in the analysis of the collected information are shown in Annex III of this report. Figure 3 shows the steps that were taken for the analysis which was conducted on the basis of the standard criteria of relevance, effectiveness and impact, coherence, efficiency, and sustainability.

Figure 3: MTR Criteria[5]
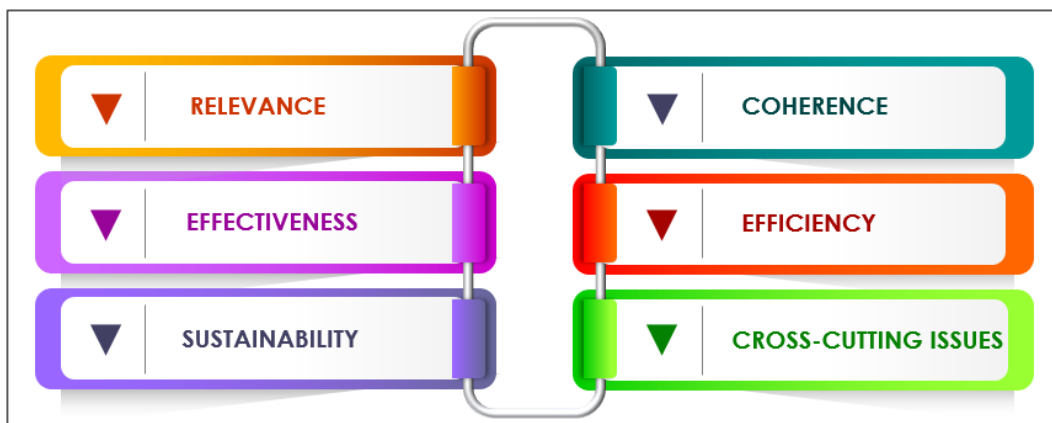
The steps that were taken in the analysis process are illustrated in the Figure 4 below. Care was given to the assessment of the extent to which the project has been successful in involving ***marginalized groups***, especially

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[5] The analysis of effectiveness included a section on the project's impact, which is a preliminary finding of the main contributions, as a real impact assessment requires a more profound process and also more time to have lapsed since the completion of the project.

women, persons with disabilities and minorities. The figure below shows the steps that were taken for the analysis.

Figure 4: Steps in Analysis Process
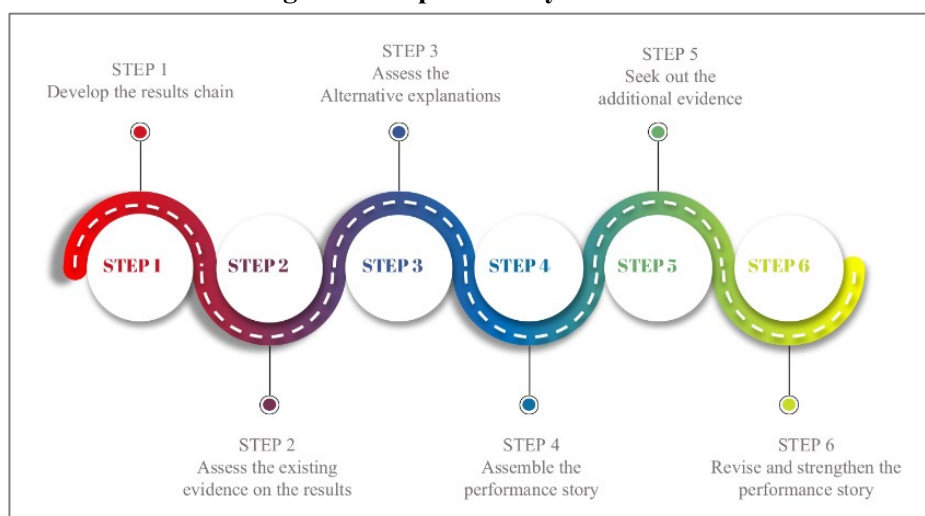
The analysis also covered aspects of formulation, such as the extent of stakeholder participation during project formulation; replication approach; design for sustainability; linkages between the project and other interventions; adequacy of management arrangements, etc.

2.3.   MTR Process and Governance

The MTR was conducted by two independent evaluators contracted by UNDP. The Resident Representative of UNDP Viet Nam served as the Commissioner of MTR process and the CO's M&E Analyst acted as the MTR Manager. This system safeguarded the independence of the review exercise and ensuring production of quality review in a timely manner. To ensure independence and impartiality, the MTR Manager served as the focal person for this MTR, ensuring that the review was conducted as per the review plan and in line with the MTR's ToR.

2.4.   MTR Limitations

The MTR process went smoothly overall, with excellent support from the PAPI team. The UNDP Country Office and the two project donors were highly engaged throughout the process. However, there were two notable limitations. First, despite multiple attempts, the MTR team could not secure an interview with the key government partner for the initiative, the Vietnam Fatherland Front. To mitigate this, the team focused on engaging closely with the project's Advisory Board and conducting in-depth interviews with relevant government institutions like the Ministry of Planning and Investment and the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics. Second, the international evaluator could not participate in field work at the provincial level due to restrictions on foreign travelers. To address this, the national evaluator fully covered the provincial field work by visiting three provinces, attending project events, and interviewing relevant parties.

2.5.   Structure of the Report

The report begins with an introductory section that provides a description of the project and the context of its implementation (previous chapter). The second (current) chapter provides an overview of the MTR objectives and methodology. The third chapter presents the main findings of the report organized in the following standard dimensions: i) Relevance; ii) Effectiveness and Impact; iii) Coherence; iv) Efficiency; v) Sustainability; vi) Cross-cutting Themes, which include the Human Rights Based Approach, Gender and Youth Mainstreaming, Disability Inclusion, Promotion of Innovations, and Environmental Sustainability. The fourth chapter identifies key "lessons learned" drawn from the experience of this project. The fifth section summarizes the main conclusions and the last (sixth) chapter provides a set of recommendations for the consideration of project stakeholders. Additional information supporting the arguments made throughout the document is provided in the annexes attached to this report.

3. FINDINGS

The MTR findings are structured into six sections: i) Relevance (the extent to which the project aligns with country priorities and needs and the UN's strategic framework); ii) Effectiveness and Impact (the project's contribution to governance transparency and accountability); iii) Coherence (the project's delivery in an internally and externally coherent and coordinated manner); iv) Efficiency (the efficient delivery of project results); v) Sustainability (the likelihood of project results being sustained after completion); vi) Cross-cutting Themes, with a focus on the extent to which the project has incorporated human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion, and other key themes).

3.1. Relevance

The following is a summary of the assessment of the project's relevance in terms of how the project was designed and delivered, its responsiveness to national needs and priorities, and its alignment with the institutional frameworks of the United Nations and contributions to the achievement of the sustainable development agenda.

Instrumental Value

In the context of Vietnam, PAPI serves a critical role in enhancing local government effectiveness by generating actionable data on public affairs and providing research, advocacy and technical advice on public governance issues. The initiative's dual aims are to (i) enable citizens to evaluate and advocate for improvements in their local government's performance, and (ii) to foster self-improvement, competition, and learning among local authorities. Central to PAPI's approach is the belief that citizens, as the ultimate beneficiaries and assessors of public services, are crucial for establishing a responsive state. This conception of the role of citizen aligns with increasing demand for transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement in governance, making PAPI highly relevant in Vietnam's evolving administrative and social landscape.

Independence and Trustworthiness

PAPI's credibility is anchored in its methodological rigor and its operational independence from undue influence[6] – especially biases related to self-interested actions by the entities whose performance is assessed. As will be shown further in this report, the PAPI initiative engages in meticulous data collection and analysis, utilizing a multi-layered approach that includes a diverse set of stakeholders, from UNDP's quality control to the grassroots level facilitators trained and coordinated by a reputable local civil society organization like CECODES. This methodological robustness is further enhanced by compliance with international standards and guided by both in-house and international expertise. The initiative's independence is further safeguarded by a National Advisory Board composed of diverse experts from various sectors, ensuring a multiplicity of viewpoints and a commitment to governance, rights-based approaches, and participatory democracy. Consequently, PAPI has gained substantial trustworthiness, evident from its long-running nature and utilization by a range of stakeholders as a reliable source of data for policy analysis and dialogue.

Comprehensiveness

Another feature of PAPI's relevance is its comprehensiveness. PAPI is not a simple survey that generates data – it is rather an eco-system of interventions that consist of reports, data, and add-on initiatives across eight key dimensions of governance (as shown in the figure below).

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[6] It is useful here to compare the independence of PAPI and the other influential survey in Vietnam – PCI (the Provincial Competitiveness Index). Both surveys strive for impartiality, but PAPI has the additional edge of international oversight through its partnership with UNDP, which enhances its credibility and independence. PCI, while independent, does not have an international body involved directly in its management, thus ensuring its impartiality (the involvement of USAID in PCI is rather marginal and consists primarily of financial support).

Figure 5: PAPI's Components and Dimensions
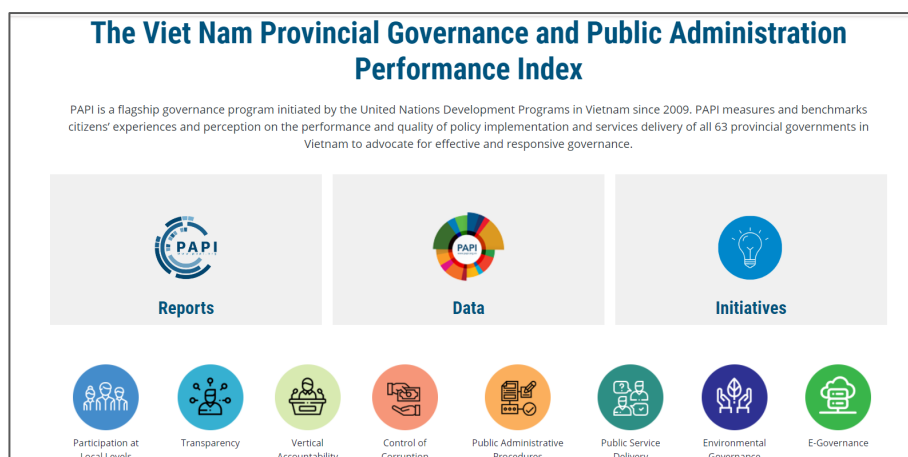
As can be seen from the figure above, the PAPI initiative can be aptly described as a comprehensive ecosystem of interventions, each designed as a package of activities aimed to inform, engage, and catalyze action across different tiers of the state and society. The following is description of the essence of each package that makes PAPI especially relevant to Vietnam's governance context.

- **Reports**: The reports' package includes the *annual PAPI report*, the *PAPI thematic reports*, and the *PAPI provincial reports*.
  - o The Annual PAPI Report serves as an authoritative resource, offering a year-on-year analysis of provincial governance performance across multiple dimensions. It is a tool for both policymakers and civil society, offering an in-depth, aggregated view of citizen experiences and perceptions.
  - o The Thematic Reports focus on specific sectors or issues, such as healthcare, education, or environment. These reports allow for targeted examinations that can inform policy priorities in specialized domains.
  - o The Provincial Reports offer granular insights at the sub-national level. They are particularly valuable for provincial governments seeking to understand their strengths and weaknesses in more depth and to benchmark their performance against peers.

- **Data**: The data component includes the raw data and the PAPI indicators.
  - o The Raw Data serves as a treasure trove for researchers, analysts, and policymakers who wish to conduct additional analyses. It allows for customized inquiries and longitudinal studies, providing an indispensable resource for academic and policy research.
  - o PAPI's indicators operationalize abstract governance concepts into measurable variables. These standardized metrics offer a way to objectively assess and compare governance quality, thereby reducing ambiguity and subjectivity.

- **Initiatives**: The so-called "*post-survey*" initiatives include various add-on initiatives to improve the performance of provincial governments in Vietnam. These range from research and advisory briefs, capacity-building workshops and technical assistance to the development of action plans and roadmaps for governance improvement. For example, Diagnostic Workshops take place at the provincial level to discuss PAPI findings and design actionable roadmaps. Capacity-building programs may focus on improving civil service competencies or optimizing administrative procedures. There are also initiatives aimed at bolstering citizen engagement in governance processes, including the development of e-governance solutions for more transparent and participatory decision-making, disability inclusion in local governance and public administration, youth engagement in the policy process, women in politics and LGBTIQ+ inclusion in good governance.

In summary, PAPI is not simply a survey, but a multi-faceted intervention that provides a 360-degree view of governance performance in Vietnam. By generating high-quality data, offering actionable insights through its reports, and catalyzing improvement initiatives, PAPI serves as a holistic platform for enhancing the effectiveness, transparency, and accountability of local governments in Vietnam.

<u>Adaptability</u>

One of the key strengths underscoring PAPI's relevance is its ability to regularly revise its indicators and methodologies to address emergent trends and challenges in governance. This adaptability indicates that PAPI does not remain static but evolves in tune with Vietnam's changing policy landscape. Some examples of PAPI's revisions over the years include integrating new dimensions like e-governance and environment to stay relevant to global imperatives like digitization and sustainability, modifying sampling strategies and analytical frameworks based on latest developments in social research methodologies, fine-tuning survey questions annually to capture citizen experiences relating to newest policy priorities and issues, adapting data collection approaches by integrating digital solutions while retaining face-to-face interviews for effectiveness, etc. Also, PAPI's increasing focus on inclusion, particularly concerning Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), underscores its adaptability (more on this further in this report). Also, PAPI's response to the challenges created by COVID-19 was swift and decisive, switching to Internet- and phone-based activities. The initiative's ability to adapt to and cover important governance issues for Vietnam's evolving policy context and governance challenges demonstrates an ongoing commitment to staying relevant.

<u>Multi-dimensional Usefulness</u>

PAPI's relevance is multi-dimensional, as PAPI has something to offer to all sections of the society. From this standpoint, its significance is derived not only from its rigorous methodology, but also from its comprehensive applicability, which spans from citizens to central government institutions. The figure below summarized the usefulness of the PAPI initiative to different layers of the society.

- From the perspective of Vietnamese citizens, PAPI is instrumental for enhancing the Accountability and Transparency of local state structures. By quantifying governance performance, PAPI provides citizens with tangible metrics that elucidate the effectiveness and efficiency of their local administrations. This ability to evaluate public services and administrative conduct empowers citizens to demand better governance and hold officials accountable for their actions or inactions. Additionally, the survey serves as a platform for Voice and Representation. The very act of participating in PAPI gives citizens a say in evaluating their governance experience, which otherwise might remain unarticulated. By capturing citizen perspectives, PAPI enriches the discourse on public administration reform.

Figure 6: PAPI's Multi-dimensional Usefulness

- Civil Society and the media benefit from PAPI in multiple ways. PAPI forges Accountability and Transparency by providing third-party validated data that can be used to scrutinize government actions. This information equips civil society organizations and media outlets with a data-driven basis for Policy Advocacy. The empirically collected and analyzed data from PAPI are valuable Data for Research, further enabling civil society to delve deeper into specific governance issues and advocate for targeted interventions. Furthermore, PAPI's in-depth research and analysis that focus on the experiences of minority ethnic groups, persons with disabilities, or economically disadvantaged communities offers invaluable insights into how governance affects social inclusion.

- From the vantage point of Private Investors, PAPI serves as a risk assessment tool and adds a layer of Accountability and Transparency that is essential for robust investment decision-making. The survey data and follow-up research and advocacy offer insights into the institutional robustness of provincial governments, thereby influencing Investment Decision-Making. Private investors are more likely to invest in provinces where governance indicators signal lower corruption, more efficient public service delivery, and better citizen engagement, as these factors collectively minimize operational and reputational risks.

- Provincial Governments directly utilize PAPI for Performance Benchmarking. With annual updates, PAPI allows provincial administrations to track their performance longitudinally and compare it with peer entities. This benchmarking is critical for Data-driven Decision-making and Policy Formulation, as it identifies both strengths to be maintained and weaknesses to be addressed. Furthermore, the public availability of this data encourages Public Engagement, thereby leading to more participatory governance models.

- For the Central Government, PAPI is indispensable for Oversight and Performance-Based Incentives. The aggregated data provide a national overview of governance performance, helping central government bodies to incentivize or intervene in provincial governance based on empirical evidence. PAPI aids in Policy Harmonization by highlighting discrepancies and facilitating the alignment of provincial governance strategies with national objectives. Lastly, the central government uses PAPI data for more efficient Resource Allocation. By identifying provinces that perform poorly in specific dimensions, resources can be allocated where they are most needed, thereby maximizing the impact of interventions.

- Other parties derive benefits from PAPI too. For international bodies like the United Nations or World Bank, as well as bilateral and multilateral donors, PAPI serves as a reliable source of information on governance in Vietnam. These organizations use PAPI data to tailor their aid programmes, focus capacity-building efforts, conduct research and monitor the impact of their interventions. Moreover, the survey's rigor and consistency make it a valuable tool for comparative governance studies across countries. International scholars and researchers in public policy, governance, and social sciences benefit from the rich dataset that PAPI offers. It serves as a primary or secondary data source for academic inquiries, case studies for comparative analysis, or even function as a teaching tool for students to understand the complexities of governance assessments.

Alignment with National Frameworks, UN and UNDP Priorities and SDGs

PAPI is aligned with Vietnam's focus on public administration reform, e-government, transparency and anti-corruption efforts under key national strategies such as the Socio-Economic Development Strategy (SEDS) for 2021–2030 and the Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP) for 2021– 2025. PAPI data informs policy reforms to improve economic governance, public service delivery and citizens' oversight - priorities under the Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2021-2030. At the same time, PAPI strengthens evidence-based policymaking using citizen feedback data - a priority highlighted in national development plans, including SEDP for 2021-2025. The PAPI methodology also engages citizens in monitoring government performance, promoting grassroots democracy - a goal under the Communist Party congresses. More importantly, a critical legal document that has guided PAPI over the past 14 years—*Ordinance No. 34/2007/PL-UBTVQH on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy at the Commune Level*—has been upgraded to become the Law on Grassroots Democracy Implementation after being discussed and approved for issuance by the National Assembly on 10 November 2022. Since 2021, PAPI has become even more relevant as the Communist Party of

Viet Nam has directed the way forward to "*modern and effective national governance reforms*" while leaving no one behind upon the 13th National Party Congress Resolution approved on 1st February 2021.

PAPI makes important contributions to UNDP's *Country Programme Document 2022-2026*, and in particular its governance objectives by generating evidence, engaging citizens, and promoting data-driven reforms for accountability and transparency of provincial authorities. PAPI directly supports Outcome 3 on governance and access to justice. It strengthens transparency, accountability and responsiveness of provincial authorities as assessed through the PAPI survey (Output 3.2). PAPI generates citizen-driven data to inform policy reforms for improved public administration, including judicial services. PAPI helps accelerate innovation in citizen participation mechanisms through its component on citizen-powered innovation initiatives, a key focus under Output 3.2. The CPD plans to build on PAPI's engagement with local innovators to create user-centric e-governance solutions. PAPI strengthens the evidence base for reforms outlined in Output 3.2 to improve transparency, integrity and accountability systems. The survey provides data to assess citizen satisfaction with government performance, including e-governance and access to e-service aspects. Furthermore, PAPI improves availability of sub-national data on governance and public administration. This supports monitoring of CPD progress and SDG implementation (Output 3.2).

PAPI was designed to contribute directly to the 2017-2020 One UN Strategic Plan Outcome 4.1. In this context, PAPI has supported Output 4.1 "*Participatory decision-making and responsive institutions*" under the Focus Area 4 "*Promoting Justice, Peace and Inclusive Governance*" - By 2021, participatory and transparent decision-making processes and accountable institutions are strengthened, with policies and implementation mechanisms that are responsive to all people, particularly vulnerable groups, women, youth and children. PAPI is also fully aligned with the new UN's One Strategic Framework (UNSDCF) for Sustainable Development Cooperation between the UN and Vietnam 2022-2026. PAPI directly supports Outcome 4 on inclusive governance and access to justice. It generates citizen-driven data to assess transparency, accountability and responsiveness of provincial authorities, which aligns with Output 4.2. PAPI also works with women, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and migrants to hear their concern and to advocate for more inclusive governance and accessible public services. PAPI strengthens availability of subnational data and research on governance and public administration for monitoring SDG implementation, a priority under the UNSDCF. PAPI helps inform evidence-based, rights-based policies, planning and budgeting through its granular data on local governance, which aligns with Output 4.6.

PAPI has provided important data, research and advocacy for Vietnam to monitor its international commitments for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, through its focus on transparency, accountability, citizen participation and public service delivery, PAPI has made important contributions towards the achievement of the SDGs in Vietnam:

- SDG 16 on *Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*: PAPI directly strengthens accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels by assessing governance practices and administrative performance.

- SDG 5 on *Gender Equality*: PAPI incorporates gender-disaggregated data and research on women's participation in governance. This underscores gaps and progress towards equal rights and opportunities for leadership for women.

- SDG 10 on *Reduced Inequalities*: PAPI's citizen-generated data and the associated research provides insights on marginalized groups' access to public services and ability to participate in local decision-making. Its findings can inform policies to empower and include all groups.

- SDG 17 on *Partnerships for Goals*: PAPI facilitates multi-stakeholder collaboration spanning government, civil society, academia and international partners. This model leverages diverse expertise to strengthen public institutions.

- SDGs 1, 3, 4 and 6 on *Essential Services*: PAPI's data, research and advocacy on education, healthcare, poverty alleviation and water/sanitation services help strengthen public service delivery and welfare policies.

- SDG 11 on *Sustainable Cities and Communities*: PAPI's subnational focus on provincial governance provides granular data and research, which enhance public service delivery and participatory planning.

PAPI makes wide-ranging contributions across governance, gender equality, inclusion, partnerships and essential services. Its evidence-based approach helps translate SDG targets into policies and reforms for people-centered, equitable and accountable development in Vietnam.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

Overall, the PAPI research and advocacy programme is highly relevant as it serves as a multifaceted platform that aligns the interests and activities of diverse stakeholders, from citizens of diverse backgrounds to the central government institutions, towards a common goal of inclusive and transparent governance and enhanced public administration performance. Due to its significant focus on the interests of those furthest behind, including women, persons with disabilities, minority groups, migrants and economically disadvantaged communities, PAPI serves as a critical instrument for identifying and addressing governance gaps that exacerbate social inequalities, thereby helping the authorities develop targeted interventions to enhance inclusive governance.https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/microcon-wp_15.pdf.

3.2. Effectiveness and Impact

This section presents an assessment of the effectiveness and impact of the PAPI initiative for the period 2019-2023.

Effectiveness

As PAPI has evolved over time from a perceptions survey to a larger research and advocacy platform, the focus of the analysis of this section in on the broader aspects of PAPI, including its policy implications. The assessment of PAPI's effectiveness comprises the following components:

- Soundness of the conceptual and methodological framework of the survey;
- Effectiveness with which the data collection exercise is conducted;
- Effectiveness of PAPI's research and advocacy functions in support of policy development;
- Achievement of the objectives set out in the initiative's results framework.

Conceptual and Methodological Framework

PAPI's conceptual and methodological approach – outlined in broad brushes in the figure below – has been collaboratively developed by all stakeholders, including VFF, CECODES, UNDP, and the two international experts associated with the project. This approach serves as an essential checklist that is rigorously followed by the team in each annual cycle of the PAPI survey. The approach comprehensively outlines the responsibilities and actions required from each stakeholder at each stage, ranging from refining the methodology and questionnaire, to conducting field surveys, writing reports, disseminating findings, and engaging in policy dialogues. This structured methodology ensures a thorough surveying and research process, made feasible through the active contributions of each team member.

Figure 7: PAPI's Key Methodological Aspects
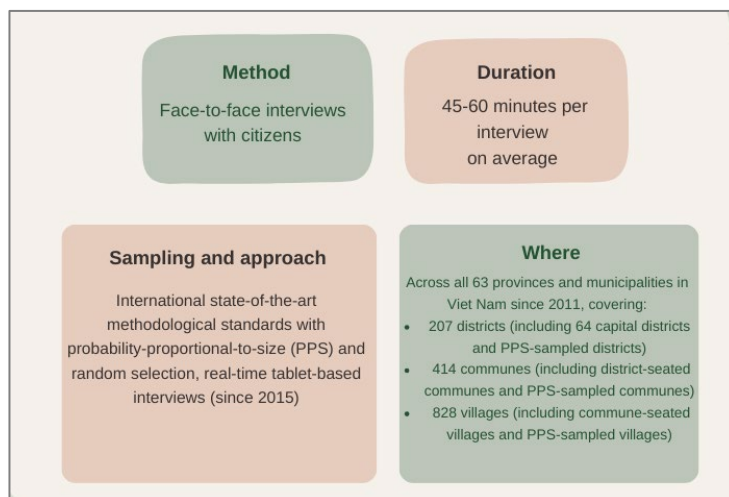
The MTR team discussed with key stakeholders PAPI's key methodological aspects. A summary of the assessment of these aspects is provided as follows and illustrated in Figure 8.

- *Conceptual Framework*: PAPI's conceptual framework is considered robust, offering a comprehensive view of public administration from the perspective of citizen experiences. While the framework is currently well-suited for its purpose, its relevance could be enhanced through periodic reviews.
- *Indicator Selection*: The existing indicators capture the core dimensions of governance well. Because the survey is designed to assess relatively stable structures of governance, the current indicators maintain the project's relevance effectively.
- *Questionnaire Design*: The design of the questionnaire is straightforward and user-friendly, which contributes to the quality of collected data. To increase its relevance, the questionnaire has been updated to include more context-specific questions related to new governance aspects like digital transformation or environmental sustainability.
- *Sampling Strategy*: PAPI's sampling strategy, refined in 2021, ensures a geographically and demographically diverse respondent pool, adding credibility to its findings. Sampling rests on a multi-staged strategy which is summarized in the box below. This has resulted in a sample size of 178,243 individuals.

Box 2: PAPI's Sampling Strategy

PAPI rests on a sound multi-staged sampling strategy, which consists of the following key steps:

- **Step 1 - Selecting districts:** From each province, the district that is seat of province selected as certainty unit and 02 other districts drawn randomly by Probability Proportion to Size (PPS) method (based on population size of each district in the province) = 03 representative districts;
- **Step 2 – Selecting communes:** From each selected district, the commune that is seat of the district was selected as certainty unit, and one additional commune drawn randomly by PPS = 02 representative communes.
- **Step 3 – Selecting villages:** From each selected commune, the village that is seat of commune selected as certainty unit, and other village drawn randomly by PPS = 02 representative villages.
- **Step 4 – Selecting households:** From each selected village, a list of all households, including all types of households being classified as permanent (KT1 + KT2) and non-permanent residence (KT3 + KT4). Then 30-40 permanent residence households and 15 non-permanent residence households are randomly selected from the list.
- **Step 5 – Selecting permanent respondents:** From the selected households with permanent residence registration in each village, an original list of 20 potential respondents set up (with potential respondents aged from 18-70 years old and currently living in the province randomly drawn); and a replacement list of 10-20 respondents also made to provide replacements for no-shows in the original list
- **Step 6 – Selecting non-permanent respondents:** From the selected households with non-permanent residence registration in each village, an original list of 10 potential respondents set up (with potential respondents aged from 18-70 years old and currently living in the province randomly drawn); and a replacement list of 5-10 respondents also made to provide replacements for no-shows in the original list

- *Weighting and Scoring*: The system for weighting and scoring is both transparent and replicable. This clarity is a strength that enhances its relevance, as it makes it easy for stakeholders to understand how final scores are calculated.
- *Data Disaggregation*: Data is effectively disaggregated, allowing for targeted analyses. This enhances PAPI's relevance for different stakeholder groups, from provincial governments to civil society organizations.
- *Longitudinal Tracking*: The longitudinal nature of PAPI enables trend analysis, invaluable for policy continuity and identifying long-term shifts in governance. This feature enhances the initiative's relevance, especially for central and provincial governments who can use the data for performance benchmarking.

Most MTR interviews indicated that PAPI's conceptual and methodological approach achieves high marks in all its dimensions. This was also confirmed by the online survey organized for this MTR with members of the PAPI Advisory Board. The emerging consensus from the survey was that PAPI has the most reliable methodology in reflecting citizens' perceptions of the efficiency of provincial public administration and governance. PAPI leverages a systematic sample to attain a representative view, encompassing diverse

respondents, ensuring comprehensive coverage. This positive assessment of PAPI's methodology is summarized in the figure below.

Figure 8: Assessment of Methodological Aspects[7]

Component	Assessment
Conceptual Framework	✔
Indicator Selection	✔ ⬅
Questionnaire Design	✔
Sampling Strategy	✔
Weighting and Scoring	✔
Data Disaggregation	✔
Longitudinal Tracking	✔

Despite PAPI's methodological soundness, two suggestions were provided by some MTR participants for the consideration of the PAPI partners:

- A shift to a bi-annual survey was an idea expressed by some stakeholders as an opportunity for the PAPI team to have some breathing space between the intensive rounds of the survey, thus being able to spend more time on the analysis of results and working with the local actors on policy improvements. Given that the governance situation on the ground does not change rapidly, a bi-annual survey provides a pretty accurate picture of the evolution of the governance situation at the provincial level. The downside of this option, however, is that a hiatus of one year decreases the momentum of the initiative, which some stakeholders saw as a risk, especially at a time when the environment for civil society initiatives is becoming more restrictive.

- Another idea is to increase the survey's sample size, which would increase the granularity of the data collected through the survey. A larger sample size would allow for better representation of minority areas or informal settlements. Furthermore, an expansion of the sample size would also allow for better data on sub-regional governance trends. However, this expansion would come with significant cost implications that need to be carefully taken into account by the project team.

Execution of the PAPI Initiative

The MTR team also discussed with key stakeholders the way in which the PAPI initiative is executed. A summary of the assessment of the execution process is shown in Figure 9 below.

- *Training of Enumerators*: The quality of the training provided to enumerators is sound, ensuring that data collection is reliable and consistent across locations and time.
- *Data Collection*: The methods employed in collecting data are rigorous, providing a sound basis for analysis. Continued investment in cutting-edge data collection technologies has further streamlined the process and reduced the margin for human error.
- *Data Quality Assurance*: With a robust set of checks and balances, the data quality assurance processes are strong, contributing to the reliability of PAPI's findings.
- *Data Analysis*: The data analysis is conducted rigorously and provides valuable insights.
- *Peer and Expert Review*: There is room for improvement in this component. A more robust peer review process involving external experts, possibly at an international level, could add an extra layer of scrutiny and credibility to the findings.

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[7] The orange arrow in the figure means that according to some PAPI stakeholders there is a potential to expand the number of indicators covered by the PAPi survey but given the extensiveness of the current form of the survey this is something that this MTR does not recommend.

- *Report Writing*: While reports are comprehensive and well-written, there is a need to make them less technical and more digestible for laypersons. Simplifying language without compromising on the quality of information can expand the report's audience and impact.
- *Dissemination*: The PAPI team has made significant improvements to the dissemination process over time, adding to the variety or activities involved and the geographical reach of the dissemination efforts. The PAPI Annual Reports are officially launched through national events that convene broad participation from government, civil society, and the provinces. For example, in 2022 over 600 participants joined the report launch event both in-person and online. The provincial diagnostic workshops have emerged as important milestones where the PAPI team presents provincial-level findings to key stakeholders. These workshops gather public officials, civil servants, and elected representatives from each province to review performance insights based on citizen feedback. The workshops enable direct communication of PAPI data to provincial decision-makers for their province. PAPI data and findings are further discussed in a large number on different mainstream media channels to promote policy discussion with provinces. While progress has been made on disseminating PAPI findings, MTR participants noted opportunities for further enhancement. For example, PAPI could develop customized data presentations tailored to technical versus general audiences. Having multiple formats would allow communicating insights more effectively to different groups. Additionally, participants suggested exploring joint events at the provincial level between PAPI and the Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI). Since PCI provincial events attract significant political attention, combining forces could leverage PCI's high profile to increase reach for PAPI's findings. Joint PAPI-PCI forums at the provincial level could create valuable synergies for disseminating insights from both initiatives.

Figure 9: Assessment of Execution[8]

Component	Assessment
Training of Enumerators	✔
Data Collection	✔ ⬅
Data Quality Assurance	✔
Data Analysis	✔
Peer and Expert Review	✔
Report Writing	✔
Dissemination	✔

Of all the steps in the process, which are also identified in the figure above, the most vulnerable to external interference is the data collection step (marked with a red arrow in the above figure). The risk in this step is that local authorities may interfere with the data collection process at the local level, potentially influencing citizens' responses in order to improve the scores. The typical scenario is one of a local authority which seeks to influence the citizens' responses just days before the PAPI enumerators visit its location. Such interference can significantly skew the data and compromise the impartiality and credibility of the entire survey process. Some cases of interference have already been detected by the PAPI team over the years. The issue of potential interference in the data collection process poses a distinct and critical vulnerability to PAPI's operational integrity. To mitigate this, UNDP and the PAPI team need to engage with a more proactive and transparent dialogue with the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF), especially at a higher level, regarding the need to safeguard the integrity of the data collection process from potential interference by officials at lower levels in the provinces.

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[8] The orange checkmarks in the figure mean that there is potential for improving the respective steps in the process, as argued in the analysis in the text. The red arrow indicates the step in the process, which is vulnerable to interference, as argued further in the analysis.

Research, Advocacy and Policy Support

PAPI makes valuable contributions beyond just collecting survey data. Through special topics presented in the annual reports, PAPI has provided in-depth policy analysis on pressing governance issues. As can be seen from the box below, since 2012, PAPI has explored key research topics such as informal payments, gender equity, COVID-19 impacts, and land governance. The topics chosen are well aligned with political processes and the macro socio-economic situation in Vietnam – e.g., the election cycle (2016, 2021), signing of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (2016), COVID-19 (2020-2021), and the revision of the Land Law (2022-2023). This research dimension greatly enhances PAPI's utility for stakeholders at the national and provincial levels and exerts greater influence on the public discourse.

Box 3: Special Issues Covered by the 2012-2020 PAPI Reports

The following are some of the special issues covered by the PAPI reports in the period 2012-2020:

- Informal Payments in Viet Nam *(2012 PAPI Report)*
- Equality in Access to Governance and Public Services within Provinces (with a gender lens) *(2013 Report)*
- Strengthening PAPI Reliability *(2014 PAPI Report)*
- Citizen Political Participation (with a gender lens) *(2015 PAPI Report)*
- Poverty, Environment, Trans-Pacific Agreements (with a gender lens) *(2016 PAPI Report)*
- Poverty, Environment, E-governance *(2017 PAPI Report)*
- Economic Inequality, Economic-Environment Trade-offs, Gender and Leadership *(2018 PAPI Report)*
- Gender and Leadership before 2021 Election *(2019 PAPI Report)*
- COVID-19 Impact on Local Governance and Governance and Migration *(2020 Report of April 2021)*
- Migration and Governance *(2021 PAPI Report issued in May 2022)*
- Land Governance Issues *(2022 PAPI Report issued in April 2023)*

In the realm of advocacy, PAPI has maintained strong public engagement. For example, the 2022 hybrid national launch drew in excess of 650 participants, maintaining the initiative's historical record of attracting over 500 in-person attendants in non-pandemic years. A sustained media presence, featuring regular contributions to state media, amplifies PAPI's reach and influence. Additionally, a well-maintained PAPI website and active social media channels, including YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, provide multiple avenues for disseminating information and engaging with both domestic and international audiences.

PAPI positively influences local governance reform through its provincial diagnostic workshops. These workshops serve as platforms for provinces to analyze and discuss PAPI findings relevant to their jurisdiction. For example, in 2022, 14 provinces held their own diagnostic workshops to review PAPI data. Moreover, over 30 provinces took the proactive step of updating their action plans based on the insights gleaned from PAPI. In addition, PAPI has completed 55 case studies (cumulatively since 2011), using PAPI data to look into the supply side's inputs for key dimensions under the PAPI survey. Additionally, PAPI has provided training sessions for newly elected deputies of the People's Councils aimed at equipping the new deputies with relevant skills for their positions. This body of work demonstrates PAPI's catalytic role in driving sub-national governance improvements beyond the general of statistics – and with more direct policy support.

Achievement of Objectives

The MTR included an analysis of the initiative's results framework, which is presented in Table 2 below. PAPI's results framework includes several strengths, including clearly articulated outputs and activities related to PAPI data collection, analysis, and dissemination. It incorporates specific indicators and targets for tracking progress across these different stages. The framework covers engagement at both the national and provincial levels in Vietnam. It also highlights the potential to conduct thematic research studies utilizing PAPI data.

However, there are also several weaknesses that require greater attention from the team. The results framework focuses heavily on processes and activities, rather than longer-term outcomes and impact. While understanding the process is essential, it is equally crucial to measure the tangible effects these processes have on the ground. The framework suffers from a lack of clarity on how PAPI data actually leads to improvements in governance and inclusion. The theory of change or results chain mapping how PAPI outputs will achieve intended outcomes is not well articulated. Many of the indicators in the results framework are output-oriented, such as number of reports or events, rather than results-oriented.

Overall, the result framework does not do justice to the real contributions of the PAPI initiative at the outcome level. While it is clear that PAPI contributes to shared outcomes under UNDP's Country Programme Document or UN's cooperation framework, there is an opportunity to capture these contributions more effectively through the development of a theory of change[9] that identifies key outcome indicators tied to governance improvements enabled by PAPI, setting ambitious, but feasible targets for policy and governance changes based on PAPI activities, balancing output indicators with more results-oriented indicators, establishing clear baselines and benchmarks for higher-level results, including indicators tracking use of PAPI data by different stakeholder groups, and incorporating indicators on the effectiveness of PAPI's research, communication and advocacy efforts. Overall, the results framework could be augmented with outcome-focused indicators reflecting the changes and benefits experienced by stakeholders, communities, or the overall governance framework.

The analysis of the project's results framework, shown in Table 2 below, indicates that the PAPI project is on track to achieving all set targets. The project has made considerable progress in most areas like fieldwork completion, data finalization, and report production, and especially in communicating its outputs and promoting inclusive governance. For example, the methodology refinement has occurred every year as planned. Fieldwork has also been completed every year. For dataset finalization and initial analysis, the current status matches the target of one per year. Similarly, for the final report and the national launch event, the target of one per year has been reached. For provincial dissemination workshops, the target was 80, with 72 conducted as of 2023. On data use for policy monitoring, the target of 9 appears to have been met with a current status of 7. For case studies, the target was 27 per year, with 26 completed as of 2023. This target has been nearly achieved by 2023.

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[9] A brief Theory of Change for the PAPI initiative was reconstructed by the MTR team and is presented in the "Project Description" section of this report.

Table 2: Achievement of Project Results

EXPECTED OUTPUTS	OUTPUT INDICATORS	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE (2017) Value	BASELINE (2017) Year	RESULTS Target (2025)	RESULTS Current Status (2023)	Trend
1. THE VIETNAM PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION INDEX (PAPI) 2018-2021 (under Outputs 1, 2, 3 and 4 in PAPI's annual work plan)	- Standardized robust and objective methodology set forth for PAPI further refined and followed upon for PAPI by end of May	Minutes on refined methodology	1	Every year	9	7	On Track
1. THE VIETNAM PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION INDEX (PAPI) 2018-2021 (under Outputs 1, 2, 3 and 4 in PAPI's annual work plan)	- Fieldwork for PAPI completed in all 63 provinces by December	PAPI Dataset	1	Every year	8	5	On Track
1. THE VIETNAM PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION INDEX (PAPI) 2018-2021 (under Outputs 1, 2, 3 and 4 in PAPI's annual work plan)	- Dataset for PAPI finalized for analysis by mid-December	Verified PAPI Dataset	1	Every year	8	5	On Track
1. THE VIETNAM PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION INDEX (PAPI) 2018-2021 (under Outputs 1, 2, 3 and	- Initial analysis of PAPI data carried out in the second half of December for further writing up of PAPI report in following year January and February	PAPI Data	1	Every year	8	5	On Track

EXPECTED OUTPUTS	OUTPUT INDICATORS	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE (2017) Value	BASELINE (2017) Year	RESULTS Target (2025)	RESULTS Current Status (2023)	Trend
4 in PAPI's annual work plan)							
1. THE VIETNAM PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION INDEX (PAPI) 2018-2021 (under Outputs 1, 2, 3 and 4 in PAPI's annual work plan)	- PAPI data analyzed by PAPI research team members by February	PAPI Data and other references	1	Every year	8	5	On Track
1. THE VIETNAM PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION INDEX (PAPI) 2018-2021 (under Outputs 1, 2, 3 and 4 in PAPI's annual work plan)	- Final PAPI Report completed, validated with the National Advisory Board	PAPI Data and other references	1	Every year	9	6	On Track
1. THE VIETNAM PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION INDEX (PAPI) 2018-2021 (under Outputs 1, 2, 3 and 4 in PAPI's annual work plan)	- National launching event to disseminate latest PAPI findings by March/April	PAPI Data and Reports	1	Every year	9	6	On Track
1. THE VIETNAM PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION INDEX (PAPI) 2018-2021 (under Outputs 1, 2, 3 and	- Regional/ provincial dissemination workshops to disseminate PAPI findings convened for further policy dialogues with provinces after PAPI findings are launched each year	PAPI Data and Reports	10	Every year	80	72	Likely to exceed the target

EXPECTED OUTPUTS	OUTPUT INDICATORS	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE (2017) Value	BASELINE (2017) Year	RESULTS Target (2025)	RESULTS Current Status (2023)	Trend
4 in PAPI's annual work plan)							
1. THE VIETNAM PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION INDEX (PAPI) 2018-2021 (under Outputs 1, 2, 3 and 4 in PAPI's annual work plan)	- PAPI findings and data used at the central level for policy monitoring purposes (e.g., in M&E of corruption and anti-corruption work; in PAR Index by the Government) throughout the year	Media coverage and Government reports	1	Every year	9	7	On Track
1. THE VIETNAM PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION INDEX (PAPI) 2018-2021 (under Outputs 1, 2, 3 and 4 in PAPI's annual work plan)	- A series of case studies on good and poor performers for peer learning throughout the year using time-series data	Case study reports	28	Every year	27	26	Likely to exceed the target
2. PAPI-BASED INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE PROMOTED THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH & LOCAL INITIATIVES (under Outputs 3 and 5 in PAPI's annual work plan)	- Thematic research studies on inclusive governance, citizen participation, persons with disabilities, gender equity based on PAPI findings	Published reports	3	Every year	Blank cell in UNDP published report	20	Blank cell in UNDP published report
2. PAPI-BASED INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE PROMOTED THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH & LOCAL INITIATIVES	- Central and provincial initiatives on citizen engagement and public services	Number of local initiatives supported	2	Every year	Blank cell in UNDP published report	6	Blank cell in UNDP published report

| EXPECTED OUTPUTS	OUTPUT INDICATORS	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE (2017) Value	BASELINE (2017) Year	RESULTS Target (2025)	RESULTS Current Status (2023)	Trend
(under Outputs 3 and 5 in PAPI's annual work plan)							
3. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION OF PAPI-RELATED OUTPUTS (under Outputs 4 and 5 in PAPI's annual work plan)	- PAPI and thematic research findings on inclusive governance, citizen participation, persons with disabilities, gender equity using PAPI widely communicated	Media coverage of research findings	100	Every year	Blank cell in UNDP published report	2100	Blank cell in UNDP published report
3. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION OF PAPI-RELATED OUTPUTS (under Outputs 4 and 5 in PAPI's annual work plan)	- Thematic research advocacy events on inclusive governance, citizen participation, persons with disabilities, gender equity using PAPI	Dissemination and advocacy events	3	Every year	Blank cell in UNDP published report	24	Blank cell in UNDP published report
3. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION OF PAPI-RELATED OUTPUTS (under Outputs 4 and 5 in PAPI's annual work plan)	- www.papi.org.vn website updated and maintained regularly throughout PAPI iterations	The website	1	Every year	Blank cell in UNDP published report	7	Blank cell in UNDP published report

PAPI's Utilization and Impact

One of the key questions at the center of this MTR was – ***What has been the utility and impact of PAPI in these 15 years of its existence? What difference has it made it Vietnam?***

First and foremost, the fact that the PAPI initiative has been able to run and evolve for 15 years is a significant achievement in and of itself. PAPI is a significant milestone for the country, UNDP and the donors that have supported it, and for the PAPI team itself. It is rare to find an independent non-commercial initiative that runs uninterrupted for 15 years. And it is rarer to find an initiative that remains methodologically sound and consistent throughout such a long period of time. And, the fact that this has been achieved in a context like Vietnam, where the space for independent research and policy advocacy is limited, adds to the unusual success of the PAPI initiative.

It is unlikely that PAPI could be launched today given the current conditions in Vietnam. Its inception 15 years ago was fortuitous timing, with its founders seizing a favorable opportunity. What has allowed PAPI to operate in the meantime has been the rigorousness with which it has been conducted, which has contributed to its credibility and reputation. And herein lies one of PAPI's greatest contributions in the country. PAPI, with its objective, rigorous and state-of-the-art methodology, has gradually contributed to shifting the central and local governments' mindsets towards an openness to external reviews and citizen feedback of the system's performance in governance and public administration.

Along with PCI, PAPI has pioneered sociological and governance surveying in Vietnam. These two pioneering surveys in the country can be credited to have spawned a myriad of other sociological and governance surveys.[10] They have been crucial for the emergence of multiple assessment tools, leading to an increasing focus on evidence-based policymaking, as well as greater demand for benchmarking government performance at national, provincial and sectoral levels. This has created a growing momentum around participatory, transparent and accountable governance in Vietnam.

Figure 10: PAPI's Key Results in 2022
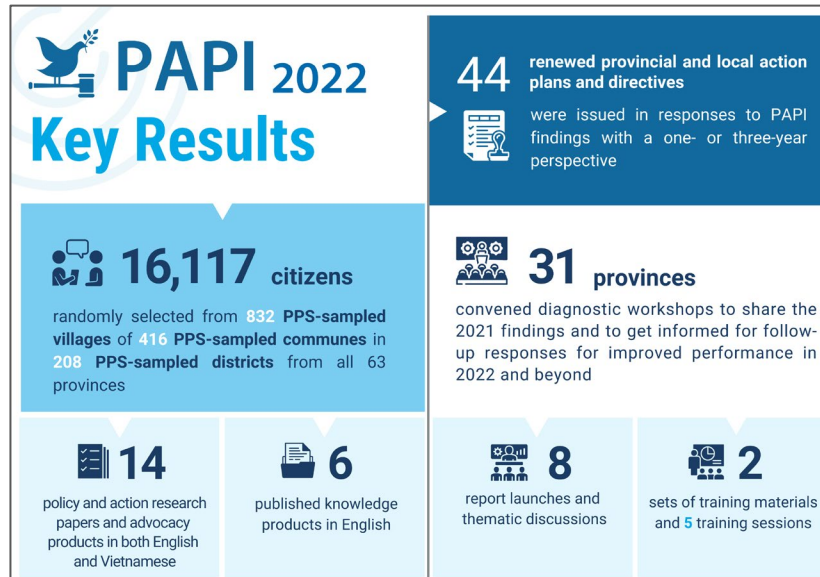
Furthermore, PAPI has provided considerable utility through the consistent and comprehensive measure of governance performance at the provincial level across multiple dimensions like transparency, accountability, participation, public administrative procedures, etc. With 178,243 citizens randomly selected and interviewed across all 63 provinces up to 2022, the data collected holds high statistical relevance and validity. PAPI's comprehensive approach allows for nuanced assessments and rigorous analysis. As an example of this comprehensiveness, Figure 10 above provides a summary of PAPI's key results for the year 2022.

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[10] Major surveys include PCI, PAPI, Open Budget Index, PAR Index, SIPAS, PACA, E-Government Index, Vietnam Digital Transformation Index, and Patient Satisfaction Index among others.

Moreover, the data and analysis from PAPI reports have supported evidence-based policymaking to improve governance in Vietnam. The reports have highlighted major governance challenges facing different provinces and offered insights into factors driving better or worse performance. PAPI data is used by provincial governments for performance benchmarking and planning, central state institutions for policy assessment and formulation, civil society groups for research and advocacy, local media for investigative reporting, international organizations for local and global assessments, and academic researchers for studies. Figure 11 below illustrates the various uses of PAPI data by different stakeholders in Vietnam and internationally.

Figure 11: Usefulness of PAPI's Data
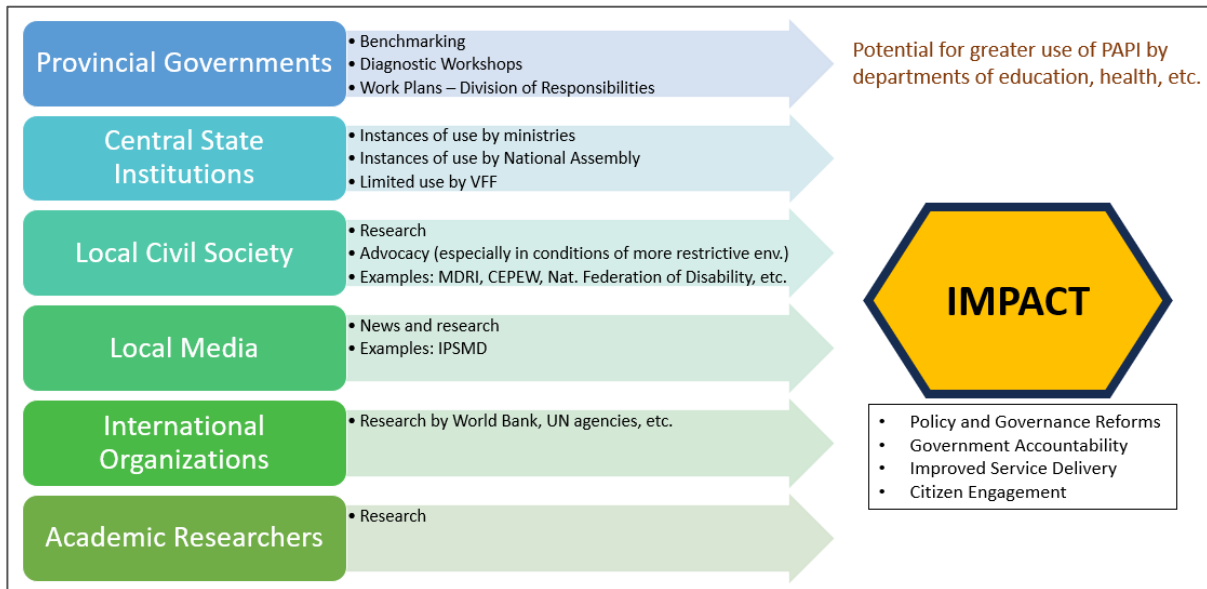
- **_Provincial Governments_**: For the 63 provincial governments and their associated structures, PAPI serves as both a diagnostic tool and a policy guide. PAPI's data related to essential public services allows local and central governments to identify bottlenecks and inefficiencies. Further, PAPI's role in benchmarking provincial governance provides an additional layer of accountability as local governments are not just answerable to the central authority, but also to their constituents. This is evidenced by increased competition among provinces to improve their PAPI scores, which, in turn, has contributed to more focused and accountable governance. As one member of the Advisory Board put it, "_ranking provinces annually has instilled healthy competition among localities. However, this brings forth challenges to ensure unbiased responses and prevent interference in survey processes_". Moreover, the data assists provincial bodies in formulating data-driven strategies and policies, as well as to strengthen administration processes (for example, for better execution and monitoring of departments' activities). PAPI data also serves as a tool for formulating work plans and clarifying the division of responsibilities among various provincial departments. All 63 provinces (cumulatively since 2011) have developed action plans, provincial directives, or resolutions aimed at improving PAPI scores and citizens' satisfaction. This shows that local governments are actively using PAPI data for governance reforms, thus fulfilling one of the primary objectives of the initiative. Proactive engagement with PAPI findings is further demonstrated by the fact that every province has hosted or participated in diagnostic workshops. Importantly, these workshops are self-funded by the provinces, showcasing a direct financial commitment to improving governance and public administration based on PAPI findings.

- **_Central State Institutions_**: Central-level agencies, especially the line ministries, but also the Communist Party and the National Assembly, benefit from PAPI data by gaining a granular understanding of governance at the local level. This assists them in their oversight functions and helps calibrate performance-based incentives and policy harmonization efforts. Additionally, the PAPI data serves as a feedback mechanism that can inform resource allocation. The influence of PAPI on national policy and decision-making is apparent - its findings have been cited by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Ministers in their

annual dialogues with provincial governments.[11] PAPI findings have been referenced in various government reports to the Communist Party Central Committee, the Government and the National Assembly. Citizen feedback of local governments' performance in PAPI has also been frequently cited by top leaders from the Communist Party of Vietnam, the Government and the National Assembly in meetings with provinces or sectors.[12] The MTR also noted several instances where PAPI data had been utilized for policy formulation and evaluation at the central level. Furthermore, the integration of PAPI findings and methodology into high-level training programmes for senior Party and government officials signals an institutionalization of the PAPI approach within the Vietnamese governance architecture. The collaboration with academic institutions like the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics has enriched the intellectual rigor of PAPI. This partnership serves to deepen the understanding of governance issues and strategize more effectively for improvement.

- *Local Civil Society*: MTR interviews indicated that PAPI data has been crucial for local civil society organizations, such as the MDRI, CEPEW, and the National Federation of Disability, in research and advocacy, particularly under the more restrictive conditions of the last couple of years. Despite this, as will be discussed further in the "*Sustainability*" section of this report, the engagement of civil society with the PAPI events, especially at the level of policy analysis and advocacy, remains limited. There is also a need for capacity building within these organizations to optimize the use of PAPI data for advocacy and strategic interventions.

- *Local Media*: Extensive annual media coverage organized by the PAPI team has enhanced public awareness and engagement. In interviews for this MTR, organizations like IPSMD reported that media outlets utilize PAPI data extensively for news and research to inform public opinion.

- *International Community*: The international community, including development organizations and international NGOs, utilize PAPI to inform their strategies, including aid allocation and partnership formations. PAPI's comprehensive view of local governance conditions in Vietnam provides a reliable basis for effective international cooperation and dialogue. The use of PAPI data in research by entities such as the World Bank and UN agencies shows the initiative's credibility at the international level. PAPI's experience has been shared through various South-South cooperation events between Vietnam and other interested countries. For example, earlier in 2023, Cambodia sent a delegation to Vietnam to learn about PAPI. Bangladesh and Laos have also expressed interest in learning from Vietnam's experience with PAPI. PAPI has proven to be a useful model for South-South knowledge sharing and collaboration aimed at improving provincial governance and public administration. However, the scope exists to encourage broader and more regular integration of PAPI data into global governance assessments and comparative studies.

- *Academic Researchers*: The academic and research community, both within Vietnam and internationally, finds in PAPI a rich dataset for policy analysis, governance studies, and comparative research. It contributes to a body of knowledge that can have implications far beyond Vietnam's borders. The increase in international publications indicates PAPI's growing influence beyond Vietnam's borders.

- *Vietnamese Citizens*: For the citizens, PAPI acts as a voice amplifier. One of the most crucial impacts of PAPI is in fostering greater citizen engagement. PAPI not only gives citizens a voice, but also provides them with evidence-based data that can be used for community discussions and advocacy. Additionally, it enables citizens to become more informed participants in their governance structures. In this way, PAPI serves as both an instrument of measurement and a catalyst for greater citizen-government interaction. By making performance data publicly available, PAPI has created a mechanism for the citizenry and other

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[11] For example, at the Conference on Promulgation of the Mekong Delta Regional Master Plan and Investment Promotion for the 2021-2030 Period held by the Ministry of Planning and Investment on 21 June in Can Tho, Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh directed provinces in the region to focus on improving provincial administrative reform indexes, including PAPI.

[12] For instance, at the National Assembly's request, 500 books of the 2021 PAPI Report were delivered to the National Assembly delegates attending the Spring Meeting in from 20 May to 20 June 2022.

stakeholders to hold government entities accountable for their actions or lack thereof. By giving citizens a structured way to evaluate public administration and governance at the local level, PAPI facilitates better informed dialogue and advocacy. It has also cultivated a sense of accountability and transparency, thereby elevating the expectations citizens have for their governments.

For all the benefits and utility of the PAPI initiative described above, a fundamental question that repeatedly came up in the course of the MTR was - *Is there potential for more effective utilization of PAPI data and greater impact of the initiative on governance and service delivery?* The predominant opinion among MTR interviewees is that there are opportunities to further maximize PAPI's utilization and impact. The following is a summary of the main ideas that were provided by PAPI stakeholders in the course of this MTR how to strengthen PAPI's utilization and impact.

Provincial Level: While currently the PAPI data serves as a diagnostic tool, its utility for actionable governance and service delivery improvements at the provincial level could be enhanced. By providing actionable insights based on the survey's diagnosis, PAPI can guide policy formulation and implementation more effectively. In other words, the diagnostic power of PAPI can be harnessed more effectively to guide provincial governments in policy formulation and implementation. The following are some ideas for how this could be achieved.

- Firstly, there is room for more specialized provincial departments, like education and health, to integrate more effectively PAPI findings into their specific strategies and programmes. One of the most immediate opportunities lies in offering targeted support to provinces for policy formulation and implementation in these specific sectors based on PAPI findings. The PAPI team has already taken steps in this direction, as exemplified by the recent engagement with the education sector in the Binh Phuoc province.[13] However, more in-depth workshops and consultations will help provincial policymakers in these sectors tailor their strategies more closely to the unique governance challenges identified by PAPI.

- Secondly, local authorities need increased capacity to interpret PAPI data and implement appropriate reforms. This will require further building analytical capacity within provincial sectoral departments and establishing clear mechanisms for feeding findings into annual planning and budgeting. Granular PAPI data on provincial performance could inform customized training programmes and hands-on workshops for local government staff aimed at strengthening weak areas. This is another area where the PAPI team has started making inroads recently. Thanks to financial support from DFAT and Ireland, the PAPI team is currently providing technical assistance to three provinces - Ha Giang, Tay Ninh and Quang Tri - through the citizen-powered innovation initiatives. With increased financial contributions, UNDP could deploy more technical assistance and training programmes to help provincial education, health, and other specialized authorities to fully capitalize on PAPI's potential to drive localized performance improvements.

- Another area in which the PAPI team has made progress recently has been in conducting complementary action-oriented research and advocacy that goes beyond the assessment to identify solutions tailored to each locality. This work needs to be continued and expanded further. With its grassroots-level engagement, PAPI can identify good practices from high performers for replication across provinces.[14] Deep community-level research can also diagnose root causes of persistent governance gaps.

- Furthermore, there is also considerable opportunity to intensify the training of national experts at the sub-national level. Working closely with the Department of Home Affairs (DOHA) and other relevant agencies, PAPI can facilitate capacity-building programmes that integrate PAPI data analytics, research, and advocacy modules, ensuring that national experts are fully equipped to implement best practices in governance.

- While PAPI currently provides annual provincial governance data, introducing real-time feedback mechanisms could amplify its impact by enabling rapid response from local governments. The PAPI team is currently discussing with the Office of the Government's Agency for Public Administrative Control the

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[13] Link to the event here.

[14] An example of peer learning and sharing effective models among provinces to address issues raised by PAPI data was noted between Ha Giang and Quang Tri provinces on e-governance.

development of a dashboard system that would facilitate this dynamic feedback for quarterly or even daily review by officials. This a significant step that should be pursued further.

Central State Institutions: Some MTR interviewees indicated that there is potential for greater use of PAPI at the central level, including by the key partner Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF). This was confirmed by the survey with Advisory Board members, who noted that PAPI's influence at the central level appears limited. VFF's reports summarizing opinions and petitions of voters and people presented to the National Assembly in its plenary sessions have yet to use PAPI data and results. The dossiers of the Law on Grassroots Democracy do not refer to PAPI results in the assessment of the implementation of the grassroots democracy, even though at least three PAPI dimensions cover the content of the Law. PAPI's findings have only been sporadically mentioned in central reports or speeches, without forming a solid base for policy reforms. At the macro level, PAPI's data could be used more systematically as an evidence-based instrument that governments and policymakers can use for implementing major reforms.

- Firstly, PAPI's insights on governance gaps and areas of inefficiency could be integrated more effectively into national policy frameworks. Integrating PAPI findings into existing governmental planning and review processes would make PAPI part of internal oversight systems, rather than just an external evaluation.

- Furthermore, PAPI data offers opportunities for comprehensive policy research, not just limited to governance but also extending to other critical areas like Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), environmental protection, and social equity. The collaboration with institutes like Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (HCMA) on topics such as e-government is a great example. It should be used as a template to further expand the way in which PAPI data and research can enrich academic and policy dialogue. Regular policy dialogues involving multiple stakeholders could be intensified, providing a forum to dissect complex issues and develop targeted interventions based on empirical evidence.

Media: While the PAPI team has made significant inroads with the release of articles and policy notes almost every month, further collaboration with the media could be explored. Some PAPI Advisory Board members noted that the dissemination and discussion of PAPI results in the mainstream media has been limited. Media portrayal is mostly confined to annual report launchings. According to these members, while the initiative holds substantial value, its representation in the media has been inadequate. Several improvements were suggested for this MTR. For example, in-depth reports co-produced with journalists could unleash the impact of granular PAPI data and research on critical weaknesses deserving exposure and reform. More humanized storytelling around the citizen impacts of governance shortfalls could compel greater accountability. Furthermore, support from PAPI for greater capacity of media organizations to analyze PAPI data more intensively will lead to deeper investigative reporting and more nuanced discussions of governance issues.

Academic Research: While PAPI data serves as an important resource for academic research, its utilization could be more intensive among academic circles in Vietnam, covering interdisciplinary studies that can offer new perspectives on governance challenges. By providing more capacity development support for academic institutions, the PAPI initiative can significantly amplify its impact, serving not just as a diagnostic tool, but as a driving force for governance excellence, thereby reinforcing its role as a key player in Vietnam's governance landscape.

Overall, PAPI has become a multi-faceted initiative whose utility cuts across various layers of the Vietnamese society. It simultaneously empowers individual citizens, strengthens institutional mechanisms, and fosters a more transparent, accountable, and effective governance environment. Through these channels, PAPI constitutes an invaluable asset for advancing democratic governance and public administration in Vietnam. While there is potential for more extensive engagement of PAPI with issues such as sectoral policies in education and health at the provincial level, building analytical capacity in national institutions, encouraging integration into national and local strategies and policies, and promoting interdisciplinary research, the feasibility of expanding PAPI's work depends largely on requests for assistance and collaboration opportunities from the government, as well as financial limitations.
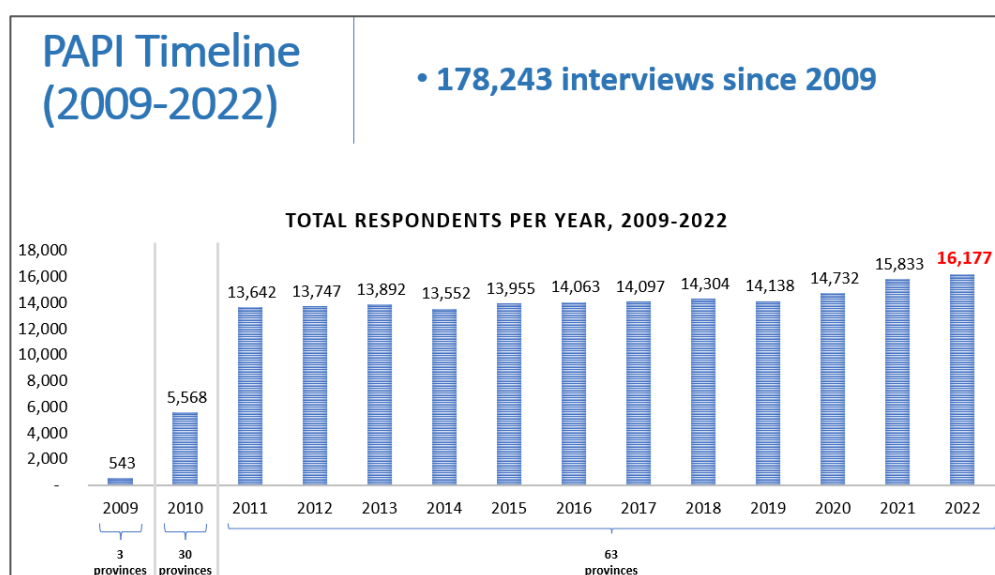
3.3. Coherence

The following is a brief discussion of the coherence of the PAPI initiative.

Internal and Longitudinal Coherence of the PAPI Initiative

The PAPI initiative demonstrates strong internal and longitudinal coherence that has been critical to maintaining its credibility and impact over 15 years.

- Internally, PAPI exhibits methodological consistency across components and a clear division of labor based on partners' specialized skills. The well-structured nine-step implementation approach engages diverse stakeholders and serves as an essential checklist for annual PAPI cycles. Additionally, PAPI's organizational framework is enhanced by a diverse group of stakeholders, such as the UNDP, CECODES, RTA, and the international experts. This structure not only promotes specialization-based task distribution, but also reinforces the project's cohesive foundation. The use of sophisticated IT systems for data acquisition further consolidates this internal methodological consistency.

- As can be seen in the figure below, a key facet of PAPI's longitudinal coherence is its vast dataset spanning 15 years, which provides an unparalleled opportunity for in-depth trend analysis on Vietnam's administrative reforms over the past decade and a half. PAPI's longitudinal data enables governance experts to track changes on specific indicators across the 63 provinces over time to identify trends, progress and emerging issues, conduct time series analysis to model how specific dimensions like transparency or accountability have evolved based on PAPI's annual snapshots, analyze how provincial rankings on PAPI indices have shifted annually, link PAPI findings with major administrative reforms to assess their on-ground impact through a before-after analysis, etc. Such rich longitudinal insights would be impossible to garner from small-scale and ad-hoc governance surveys.

Figure 12: PAPI's Timeline[15]

[15] This figure is taken from a project presentation.

A particular feature of Vietnam's public administration is the proliferation in recent years of social surveys that seek to capture various aspects of the country's governance and social life. The main surveys which are currently operational in Vietnam are shown in the figure below.

Figure 13: Governance and Social Surveys in Vietnam[16]
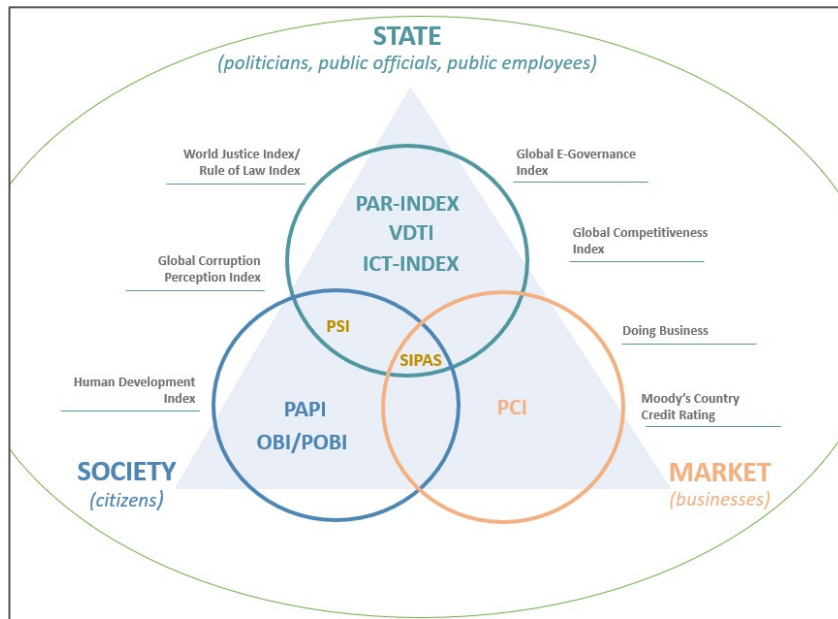
In this context, PAPI operates within a dense eco-system of surveys in Vietnam. As can be seen in the figure below, prior to 2005, there were no comprehensive nation-wide surveys to systematically assess and benchmark the performance of provincial governments in Vietnam.

Figure 14: Evolution of Surveying Landscape in Vietnam[17]
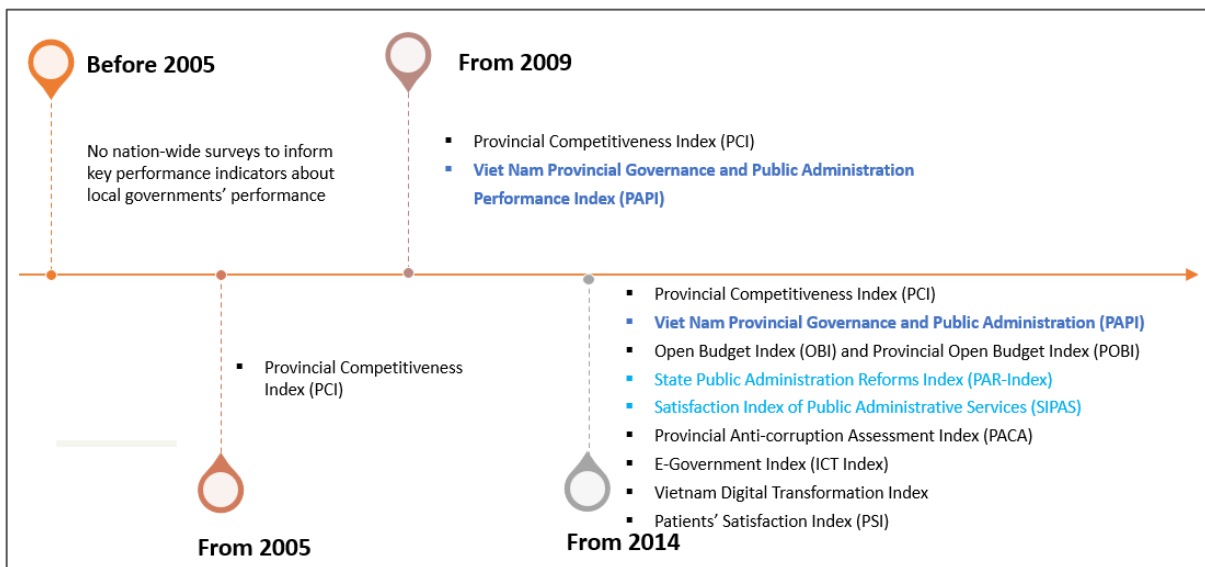
The first such survey was the Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI) introduced in 2005 to measure economic governance at the provincial level. This was followed by the launch of the PAPI survey in 2009. Since 2014, there has been a proliferation of governance surveys by both state and non-state actors to evaluate different aspects of provincial governance in Vietnam. Major surveys include PCI, PAPI, Open Budget Index, PAR Index, SIPAS, PACA, E-Government Index, Vietnam Digital Transformation Index, and Patient Satisfaction Index among others. This emergence of multiple assessment tools reflects an increasing focus on evidence-

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.

based policymaking as well as greater demand for benchmarking government performance at national, provincial and sectoral levels.

While this diversification signifies growing momentum around participatory, transparent and accountable governance in Vietnam, it also presents some risks of fragmentation. Discussion with PAPI stakeholders for this MTR revealed that there is an overall need for greater coordination and integration of PAPI with these other related initiatives. For example, the Open Budget Index (OBI) and Provincial Open Budget Index (POBI) focus on budget transparency, an area which has significant implications for governance and corruption. Likewise, metrics from the E-Government Index or the Vietnam Digital Transformation Index are relevant to PAPI's recently added e-government dimension. The State Public Administration Reforms Index (PAR-Index) and the Satisfaction Index of Public Administrative Services (SIPAS) are also similar to PAPI's focus on citizens' experience with public administration. These indices are complementary to PAPI's own indicators, offering an understanding of service quality and administrative reform. In fact, several provinces in Vietnam have developed common plans to tackle three indexes simultaneously (PAPI, PAR-Index and SIPAS).

As Vietnam experiences this proliferation of specialized governance assessments, PAPI is well-positioned to collaborate more strategically with these initiatives. PAPI has an opportunity to complement their specialized insights through harmonization, rather than the incorporation of duplicate metrics. MTR participants mentioned a range of options when it comes to how PAPI can collaborate more strategically with these other initiatives – i.e., synchronize methodologies, mutually reference indices for validation, conduct joint comparative analyses to reveal reform needs, and coordinate procedurally on data collection and dissemination. Comparative analyses could be developed to evaluate the congruence or discrepancies between PAPI and these specialized indices. More intensive collaboration and coordination between the teams behind these various surveys can facilitate the sharing of best practices, harmonize data collection periods to reduce respondent fatigue, and even lead to joint publications that offer multi-dimensional insights into governance performance. Such collaboration can improve PAPI's comprehensiveness and policy impact without compromising its independence.

A case in point is the opportunity for greater collaboration with the Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI), which represents the oldest and perhaps most influential local governance survey in Vietnam. While coordination at the methodological level is ensured by the participation of the same international expert in the design of both surveys, the many commonalities shared by PAPI and PCI provide the ground for increased collaboration on operational aspects. The box below shows some practical examples of how the PAPI and PCI initiatives can collaborate more effectively at the operational level.

Box 4: Potential for Greater Collaboration between PAPI and PCI

While PAPI focuses on citizens' experiences with public administration and governance, PCI predominantly targets the business environment, evaluating provinces on factors that affect business competitiveness such as entry costs, transparency, and land access. PCI utilizes firm-level surveys, targeting domestic and foreign enterprises. Though precise, its sample is inherently narrower, focused on business-related issues. PCI is more geared toward economic development, providing insights into how each province can become more business-friendly.

The following are far-reaching ideas of potential areas of collaboration between PAPI and PCI for the consideration of stakeholders.

- *Shared Dissemination Platforms*: Reports and findings could be jointly presented in events at the provincial level, academic seminars, policy workshops, and media channels to maximize reach and policy traction.

- *Joint Consultative Meetings*: Regular inter-project meetings could be instituted to identify areas of synergy and to discuss the coordination of timelines, fieldwork, and stakeholder engagement strategies.

- *Specialized Task Forces*: The formation of collaborative working groups or task forces involving experts from both projects can focus on intricate challenges like data privacy, quality assurance, and contextual interpretation.

- *Pilot Collaborative Initiatives*: Before a full-fledged collaboration, pilot studies can be undertaken to gauge the practicality and effectiveness of the partnership.

Admittedly, not all of these ideas may be feasible in the current institutional and political context of Vietnam. Furthermore, most of them have substantial financial implications, which are currently not available – especially in a situation where cost-sharing from the state institutions is not available. Therefore, the above are some exploratory ideas that could be considered by the stakeholders of both surveys, depending also on the operating environment.

At the practical level, as noted in previous sections of this report, it seems that joint events at the provincial level with PCI are feasible and could offer valuable synergies. Such collaboration would not only strengthen these indices individually, but also offer a more integrated framework for evaluating governance, thereby enhancing their utility for a broad range of stakeholders.

MTR interviews also revealed that there is an opportunity to strengthen PAPI's coherence in the context UNDP's country programme. As noted previously, the PAPI initiative is embedded in the Governance and Participation Team of UNDP Vietnam, which places PAPI on a broader governance platform operated by the country office. Within this structure, PAPI has operated as a standalone and independent programme, a feature that has allowed PAPI the flexibility needed to succeed. There is, however, an opportunity for UNDP Vietnam to build a greater menu of support for provincial governments, using PAPI as the foundation on which to ground some of these other interventions. As a diagnostic tool, PAPI identifies areas needing improvement in provincial governance. Based on these findings, UNDP could partner more closely with provincial governments to develop targeted interventions that address identified weaknesses and strengthen their capabilities. In this way, PAPI can serve as an integrating platform for UNDP programming at the subnational level. Given UNDP's focus on sustainable development and governance, aligning programmes with PAPI data can lead to more effective, precisely tailored initiatives. This involves not just incorporating PAPI data into existing efforts, but also designing new programmes around PAPI results to optimize UNDP resources in high-need areas.

*   *   *

In summary, the PAPI initiative demonstrates considerable internal and longitudinal coherence, underpinned by its rigorous methodology and multi-stakeholder governance structure, and specialized division of labor among others. However, it can achieve even greater external coherence through enhanced collaborations with similar governance surveys. There are opportunities for further methodological and operational synergies with other governance indices, which have the potential to not only improve the robustness of the PAPI data, but also broaden its applicability.

3.4.   Efficiency

This section provides an assessment of the efficiency with which the project was planned, financed, and implemented.

Project Management

The PAPI initiative operates through a collaborative multi-stakeholder model, engaging various governmental, non-governmental, and international entities to assess governance and public administration in Vietnam. The Core Team, comprising UNDP, two international experts, CECODES, and Real Time Analytics (RTA), serves as the operational backbone.

*   UNDP is pivotal in this configuration, responsible for producing annual PAPI reports, disseminating key findings, and spearheading advocacy to translate these insights into policy action. As can be seen from the figure below, the UNDP PAPI team consists of a total of six staff members, four of whom are fully dedicated to PAPI-related tasks. In addition to the fully dedicated staff, there are two partially involved staff members who contribute to the PAPI programme and advocacy efforts, but are not fully embedded within these operations. The PAPI team is part of the Governance and Participation Team of UNDP Vietnam. This staffing structure indicates a dual approach: it allows for specialized skills and attention in managing and

advancing the PAPI initiative, while also leveraging the country office's broader expertise in governance and participation. The integration of staff roles across multiple dimensions suggests an organizational strategy aimed at both depth in specialized areas and breadth in governance-related activities. This composition provides a flexible, yet focused framework for implementing and advancing the the initiative's objectives.

Figure 15: Structure of PAPI Team
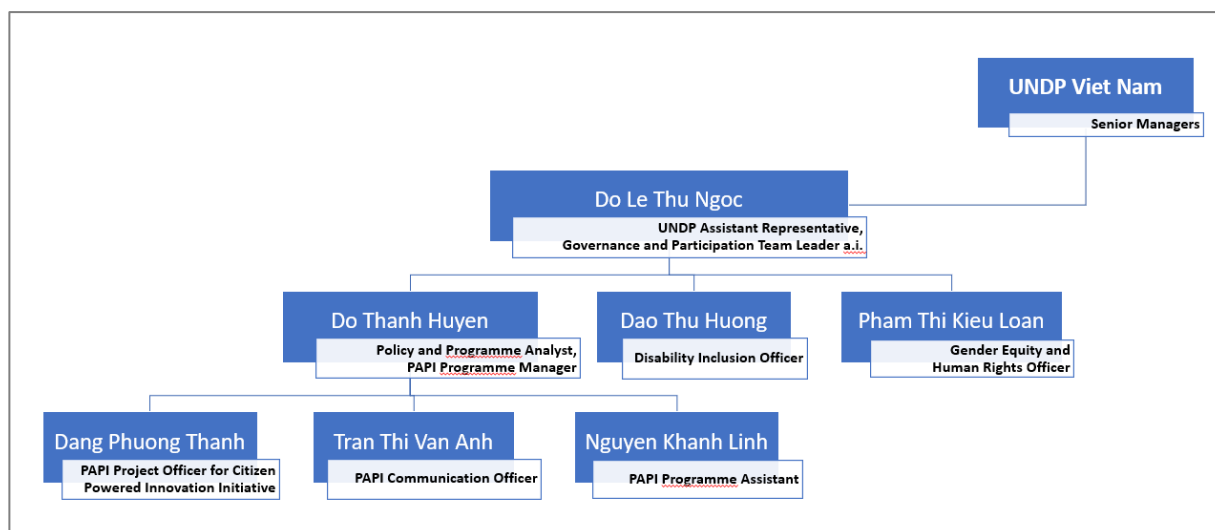
- Given PAPI's highlygh technical nature, specialized knowledge is provided through a mix of UNDP's internal expertise and external international consultants. Specifically, two international experts contribute methodological rigor, advising on survey techniques, data collection, and analytical frameworks. Their involvement ensures PAPI's adherence to international standards, enhancing its credibility and impact on governance reforms.
- CECODES handles the data collection, overseeing the recruitment, training, and management of enumerators.
- Real Time Analytics (RTA) complements this work by managing the technological facets, providing the necessary hardware for data collection and overseeing the IT infrastructure for data management.

Beyond the Core Team, the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF) is integral to the process. VFF's provincial and local committees supply the citizen lists that inform PAPI's sample selection. Its Center for Research and Training engages in activities ranging from research and training to raising public awareness. The Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (HCMA) adds an academic and policy dimension, given its mandate as the primary educational institution for local and national policy makers. The Academy is working with various organizations to substantiate the survey's methodological and analytical aspects. Collectively, these stakeholders constitute a robust and nuanced system that reinforces PAPI's credibility, comprehensiveness, and potential for generating real-world impact.

The National Advisory Board plays a critical role in guiding, monitoring, and ensuring the successful implementation of the PAPI initiative. Its members represent national legislative and executive agencies, local authorities, international partners, research institutes, non-governmental organizations, and foreign missions. Comprising diverse professionals from government bodies, international organizations, academia, and civil society, the Board provides PAPI with expertise in areas such as governance, law, economics, public policy, and international relations, thereby enriching the scope and impact of PAPI's work. This multifaceted composition provides comprehensive, multi-sectoral perspectives on governance and public administration. Its inclusive nature also promotes transparent, participatory, and rights-based approaches to governance.

Project Implementation

First of all, the PAPI survey follows a very well-conceptualized and well-organized process that has been fine-tuned and perfected over 15 years. The following are the key nine steps taken every year in the execution of the PAPI survey.

1. ***Preparation for data collection in 63 provinces***: The PAPI team undertakes preparatory activities like training enumerators, selecting respondents, and coordinating with provincial partners ahead of fieldwork in all 63 provinces of Vietnam.

2. ***Questions fine-tuned for policy relevance***: The PAPI questionnaire is reviewed and refined annually to ensure it captures citizen experiences relating to latest governance issues and policy priorities.

3. ***Survey methodology revisited***: Sampling strategies, index composition, survey approaches are re-examined to incorporate latest developments in social research.

4. ***Raw data collected from 15,000 citizens***: Trained enumerators conduct face-to-face interviews with randomly selected citizens in each province to collect raw survey data from approximately 15,000 respondents nationwide.

5. ***Preliminary data analysis***: The raw PAPI data is analyzed by lead experts to generate a preliminary understanding of survey findings.

6. ***First draft PAPI report***: Initial PAPI findings and analysis are compiled into the first draft of the annual PAPI report.

7. ***Validation by National Advisory Board***: The draft PAPI report is reviewed by eminent experts on the National Advisory Board to validate the analysis.

8. ***Finalizing high-quality PAPI reports***: Advisory Board inputs are incorporated to finalize comprehensive, rigorous PAPI reports for publication.

9. ***Continued policy dialogue on PAPI findings***: PAPI results are discussed throughout the year with government and provinces to inform policy reforms for better governance.

Also, the division of labour over the data collection process is clearly delineated among three main teams that are organized as follows.

- Team 1 comprises UNDP, acting as the quality controller, and CECODES, RTA, and VFF-CRT serving as the survey conveners and facilitators. Additionally, VFF committees in all 63 provinces act as field facilitators, ensuring local coordination and execution.
- Team 2 consists of approximately 30 experienced research collaborators who assume the roles of field controllers and team leaders, bringing professional oversight and expertise to the data collection process.
- Team 3 is made up of 300-400 final-year students or recent graduates with training in sociological research. These individuals come from diverse academic backgrounds, including social work, public administration, public health, and other governance-related fields. Their role adds an additional layer of scrutiny and academic rigor to the process, ensuring that the data collected is both robust and reliable. To ensure data integrity, data collectors are not allowed to work in the province they come from. Special attention is paid to recruiting data collectors who can speak ethnic minority languages to work in locations where residents may not speak Vietnamese fluently. As appropriate, the project may decide to hire local translators to facilitate participation of ethnic minority respondents.

As noted previously in this report, beyond its signature survey, PAPI has expanded its scope significantly in recent years to encompass capacity building, research, and advocacy. Through high-level training for government and Party officials, diagnostic workshops, increased media engagement, policy papers, technical support for select provinces, discussion events, and training workshops, PAPI has been gradually building internal expertise on governance issues to promote more actively reforms. This multi-pronged approach allows PAPI to not only diagnose governance challenges through its survey, but also directly build stakeholder capacity, share solutions, and catalyze action through complementary activities. With its expanding portfolio, PAPI is transitioning from an assessment tool to a change agent in promoting transparent, accountable, and inclusive governance practices in Vietnam.

Also, the timeline for the implementation of PAPI activities is well-established and quite efficient. The main phases of the timeline are shown below.

- May-July: Preparation for data collection in 63 provinces
- July-November: Fine-tuning of survey questions and methodology based on latest policy issues
- September-December: Raw data collected from 15,000 respondents nationwide
- January-February: Preliminary data analysis with inputs from experts
- February-March: First draft PAPI report with initial findings
- March-April: Validation of findings by National Advisory Board
- April: Finalization of high quality PAPI reports for publication
- May: Continued policy and provincial dialogues on PAPI results at central and local levels

Another key defining feature of PAPI's implementation is its inherent adaptability, ensuring its continued relevance in Vietnam's evolving socio-political landscape. PAPI regularly revises its indicators and methodologies to address emergent trends and challenges. Two recent modifications are worth noting here to highlight its adaptive nature.

- *Integration of E-Government*: By integrating an E-Government dimension into the PAPI assessment, the initiative has underscored its commitment to capturing the nuances of modern governance. This change acknowledges the accelerated move towards digitization and provides a metric to evaluate the effectiveness of digital governance systems, shaping the dialogue on the public sector's digital transformation.
- *Embracing Environmental Considerations*: The recent introduction of an environmental dimension has enabled PAPI to stay attuned to global imperatives like climate change and sustainable development. This inclusion ensures that PAPI can influence policies that that balance economic development with environmental preservation, aligning more closely with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Overall, the PAPI process stands out for its meticulous organization and diverse expertise, functioning through a multi-tiered team structure. Within the analytical framework of the PAPI initiative, engagement from all principal stakeholders in the reporting and consultation process is a critical aspect. Upon completion of data gathering and subsequent processing by CECODES and UNDP, initial findings are subjected to rigorous scrutiny through consultation with the National Advisory Board. This ensures validation of the data and its interpretation while also offering expert advice on both the substantive aspects of the findings and strategies for effective dissemination and policy dialogue. This consultative model amplifies the initiative's credibility and optimizes the potential for impactful, evidence-based policy interventions.

Risk Management

The PAPI initiative faces multiple risks that could undermine its objectives, effectiveness, and long-term sustainability. The main risks faced by the initiative are summarized in the table below, which also shows the main mitigating actions taken by UNDP.

Table 3: Project's Risk Analysis

Risk Title	Description of Risk	UNDP's Mitigation Actions
Political Risk	Potential for political interference that might compromise the independence of the PAPI initiative.	Maintain open dialogue with key government stakeholders, facilitate policy dialogues to preserve independence and garner government buy-in.
Financial Risk	Dependency on a limited number of funding sources that may challenge the initiative's financial sustainability. The project's increasing scope also requires additional financial resources, which may outpace funding availability.	Actively seek diversified funding, collaborate with provincial governments for annual funding for diagnostic workshops.
Methodological Risk	Inaccurate or outdated research methodology that could affect the reliability of the survey.	Work with international experts and academic institutions for methodological rigor. Provide technical assistance to CECODES.

Risk Title	Description of Risk	UNDP's Mitigation Actions
Operational Risk	Logistical challenges such as disruptions in fieldwork, errors in data collection, or natural disasters.	Implement rigorous operational protocols, comprehensive training for enumerators, and real-time monitoring mechanisms.
Reputational Risk	Potential damage to the initiative's credibility due to data errors, political influence, or other factors.	Maintain transparency, undergo periodic peer reviews, and engage external experts for validation.
Coordination Risk	The emergence of similar surveys might result in overlapping data or contradictions, diluting the effectiveness of PAPI.	Increase coordination efforts with other governance surveys, establish platforms for data sharing and joint research.
Legal and Regulatory Risk	Changes in legal and regulatory frameworks that might impact the initiative's operation, especially in a restrictive environment.	Ensure compliance with all local laws, maintain open channels with legal advisors, and adapt to regulatory changes.
Longevity and Adaptability Risk	Changes in social attitudes or governance structures that may make the initiative less relevant over time.	Conduct ongoing reviews and evaluations to ensure long-term relevance and adapt to societal and technological changes.
Technological Risk	Risks associated with data collection, storage, and cybersecurity.	Employ state-of-the-art IT solutions, commit to regular updates of cybersecurity measures.

Two key risks require particular attention from UNDP and stakeholders to ensure the viability of the PAPI initiative.

- First, Vietnam's increasingly restrictive environment for civil society poses a substantive threat. If transparency and public scrutiny will face increasing resistance locally or nationally, this endangers PAPI's sustainability and independence. To mitigate this, UNDP should engage high-level government allies, especially within the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF), to build stronger political support.

- Second, there exists a risk of interference in PAPI's data collection and results, particularly at the local level. As PAPI measures governance and administrative aspects, its findings can be uncomfortable to certain local authorities. As one Advisory Board member put it, "*the competitive nature of the survey might push some localities to manipulate information or adopt a superficial approach, compromising the survey's authenticity.*" Previous incidents have shown that some local institutions have attempted to manipulate the data, requiring their exclusion from annual results. These localities have resorted to adopt reactive strategies in response to their ratings, instead of making genuine administrative improvements. The real trade-off here is that although local involvement enhances the survey's ownership, it simultaneously opens avenues for tampering with citizen responses.

To manage these risks, UNDP and the partners need to formulate a contingency plan with explicit mitigation measures. This plan should be robust, flexible and rapidly deployable to safeguard PAPI. Securing high-level political support is essential for mitigating these risks. At the same time, it also increases the risks of interference, so it should be done by carefully balancing greater political involvement with stronger safeguards for the independence of the initiative. In this context, UNDP should explore avenues for more strategic engagement with the higher levels of the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF), Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), and the National Assembly to cultivate stronger political backing for PAPI. This could involve identifying key allies within these organizations and leveraging targeted advocacy efforts. Additionally, to ensure the impartiality and integrity of the data collection process, consultative mechanisms involving VFF and MOHA[18] could be instituted. These can serve as platforms to sensitize provincial officials about the critical importance of maintaining an independent and unbiased survey, while sharing insights that underscore PAPI's value and integrity.

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[18] The role of the Departments of Home Affairs (DOHAs) is particularly important at the provincial level.

Monitoring

The monitoring system established by the PAPI team reflects a meticulous approach. The system captures several facets of the PAPI initiative, from methodology refinement to data collection, analysis, dissemination, and utilization for policy advocacy. It is designed to ensure that PAPI remains an actionable, effective, and relevant tool in the governance and public administration landscape of Vietnam.

- The PAPI results framework consists of clearly delineated output indicators that help the project team and partners track the progression and achievements of the project. Clearly defined targets across years provide a roadmap and set expectations. This forward-looking approach enables stakeholders to anticipate outcomes and align their activities accordingly. It also ensures that the stakeholders have specific benchmarks to measure against and ensures that any deviations or shortcomings can be quickly identified and addressed.

- The continuous refinement of PAPI's methodology indicates a commitment to enhancing accuracy and relevance. The annual review, as evident from the minutes on refined methodology, ensures that the initiative keeps pace with evolving governance paradigms.

- The PAPI initiative has a recurring yearly framework. This ensures regularity and allows stakeholders to anticipate data requirements, collection periods, and dissemination events. The team has established a clear timeline, ensuring completion of fieldwork across all provinces by December, data analysis by February, and report finalization soon after. Regular data verification and the creation of cleaned datasets signify rigorous data handling.

- Annual Reports have been essential for providing a yearly snapshot of PAPI's progress. These reports have been essential for stakeholders, offering a consolidated view of the year's activities, results, and potential areas of concern.

- Provincial events organized by the PAPI team serve as essential touchpoints for direct interaction with local governmental bodies and civil society, allowing for immediate feedback and iterative improvement.

- The PAPI team maintains a system for tracking and collecting media clippings and government report screening. This system acts as a barometer of PAPI's public and governmental visibility.

- PAPI has been proactive in communicating its findings. National launches and provincial workshops not only share insights, but also engage in policy dialogues, reflecting PAPI's ambition to shape policy at multiple levels. The usage of PAPI data for case studies and media coverage showcases the initiative's practical implications and its utility in fostering peer learning and shaping public discourse.

- PAPI's dedicated website acts as a repository for all project-related information, updates, and publications. Its regular maintenance ensures that stakeholders and the public have a reliable source of up-to-date information.

In conclusion, the PAPI project's monitoring system is well-structured, consistent, and equipped with diversified tools that ensure comprehensive oversight.

Project Budget and Expenditure

The PAPI project secured total funding of 12,103,509 USD for the period from January 2018 to June 2025. The main sources of funding were as follows:

- **DFAT's Contribution**: DFAT committed 14,154,500 AUD including the UN levy (equivalent to 10,288,651 USD) for the 2018-2025 period (inclusive of UN levy on donors' contribution from 2020). This represented the largest share of funding for the project at approximately 85% of the total.

- **Ireland's Contribution**: Irish Aid/Embassy of Ireland committed 1,250,000 EUR including UN Levy (equivalent to 1,414,859 USD) for the 2018-2023 period. This represented around 11.7% of the total funding.

- **UNDP's Contribution**: UNDP committed to contribute 400,000 USD through a combination of direct funding and in-kind support. This has amounted to approximately 3.3 % of the total budget.

Overall, in the latest phase, the PAPI project has relied on funding from two major donors DFAT and Irish Aid, with additional support leveraged from UNDP. The long-term commitment from DFAT has provided PAPI with a stable funding base for the 7.5-year duration. Securing all its financing from official development assistance sources has allowed the project to maintain its independence.

Going forward UNDP and the PAPI team could explore more actively to supplement external financing with more sustainable domestic financing streams. For example, the project could explore financing partnerships with national institutions that have an interest in the project's success. Even modest contributions from government budgets each year could give these institutions a sense of ownership in PAPI while providing the project more stable financing. One PAPI Advisory Board member raised the possibility of "*institutionalizing the PAPI initiative within the government budget, while maintaining its independent administration by UNDP. This would embed the initiative as a regular mechanism for feedback and evaluation, while ensuring its unbiased and non-partisan nature.*" While currently the barriers to achieving this are daunting as there are legal provisions that prohibit cost-sharing by state institutions, UNDP and the development partners could advocate with the national authorities for a possible removal or relaxation of these barriers.

The table below summarizes the project's budget and expenditure for each year and the whole period of implementation (under the current phase). As can be seen from the table, over the entire period, the project has had a combined budget of $5,712,856, with total expenditures reaching $5,492,105, resulting in a commendable execution rate of 96%.

Table 4: Project's Budget and Expenditure

Year 2018

No.	Output Area	Budgeted	Spent	Execution Rate
1	Output 1	$644,592	$693,510	108%
2	Output 2	$58,000	$19,446	34%
3	Output 3	$12,000	$13,336	111%
4	Output 4	$28,000	$28,169	101%
5	Output 5	$54,000	$39,265	73%
6	Management	$166,563	$119,858	72%
7	**Total**	**$963,155**	**$913,583**	95%

Year 2019

No.	Output Area	Budgeted	Spent	Execution Rate
1	Output 1	$750,000	$721,217	96%
2	Output 2	$42,000	$23,247	55%
3	Output 3	$50,000	$42,489	85%
4	Output 4	$60,000	$32,645	54%
5	Output 5	$72,350	$44,389	61%
6	Management	$76,960	$71,960	94%
7	**Total**	**$1,051,310**	**$935,947**	89%

Year 2020

No.	Output Area	Budgeted	Spent	Execution Rate
1	Output 1	$719,628	$691,225	96%
2	Output 2	$31,250	$25,107	80%
3	Output 3	$32,500	$23,498	72%
4	Output 4	$40,875	$43,793	107%
5	Output 5	$160,875	$156,627	97%
6	Management	$91,521	$87,359	95%

No.	Output Area	Budgeted	Spent	Execution Rate
7	Total	$1,076,649	$1,027,609	95%

Year 2021

No.	Output Area	Budgeted	Spent	Execution Rate	No.
1		Output 1	$650,758	$658,592	101%
2		Output 2	$235,250	$219,808	93%
3		Output 3	$50,520	$43,468	86%
4		Output 4	$47,340	$45,475	96%
5		Output 5	$170,760	$166,134	97%
6		Management	$107,373	$92,326	86%
7		Total	$1,262,001	$1,225,803	97%

Year 2022

No.	Output Area	Budgeted	Spent	Execution Rate	No.
1		Output 1	$900,000	$878,765	98%
2		Output 2	$237,828	$201,190	85%
3		Output 3	$96,721	$76,502	79%
4		Output 4	$45,000	$42,590	95%
5		Output 5	$522,609	$561,618	107%
6		Management	$144,173	$132,074	92%
7		Total	$1,946,331	$1,892,739	97%

Year 2023[19]

No.	Output Area	Budgeted	Spent	Execution Rate	No.
1		Output 1	$950,000	$448,200	47%
2		Output 2	$175,000	$125,718	72%
3		Output 3	$112,473	$87,999	78%
4		Output 4	$61,320	$30,200	49%
5		Output 5	$786,350	$730,339	93%
6		Management	$262,180	$112,660	43%
7		Total	$2,347,323	$1,535,116	65%

ALL YEARS

No.	Output Area	Budgeted	Spent	Execution Rate	No.
1		Output 1	$3,664,978	$3,643,309	99%
2		Output 2	$604,328	$488,798	81%
3		Output 3	$241,741	$199,293	82%
4		Output 4	$221,215	$192,672	87%
5		Output 5	$980,594	$968,033	99%
6		Management	$586,590	$503,576	86%
7		Total	$5,712,856	$5,492,105	96%

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[19] As of 12 Oct 2023.

The Table 7 below summarized the project's budget execution rates. Overall, the PAPI project has generally exhibited a high execution rate over the years, often nearing the total allocated budget. While some output areas consistently reached or even exceeded their budget allocations, certain areas, notably "Output 2" in multiple years, experienced underspending. As the project moves forward, it would be prudent to closely monitor and evaluate the reasons behind these variances to ensure efficient allocation and utilization of funds.

Table 5: Project's Budget Execution Rates

Output Areas	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023[20]	Total
Output 1	108%	96%	96%	101%	98%	47%	99%
Output 2	34%	55%	80%	93%	85%	72%	81%
Output 3	111%	85%	72%	86%	79%	78%	82%
Output 4	101%	54%	107%	96%	95%	49%	87%
Output 5	73%	61%	97%	97%	107%	93%	99%
Management	72%	94%	95%	86%	92%	43%	86%
Total	**95%**	**89%**	**95%**	**97%**	**97%**	**65%**	**96%**

Value for Money

PAPI demonstrates significant value for money, characterized by its efficiency in data collection and processing forged over 15 years of uninterrupted experience, effectiveness in promoting performance competition among the provinces and influencing policy improvements, and economical use of resources. PAPI's comprehensive and inclusive approach, particularly its attention to vulnerable groups like women and persons with disabilities, highlights its commitment to equity, enhancing its overall impact. While detailed cost analyses could provide more nuanced insights, PAPI's contribution to improving governance at the provincial level, informing policy reforms, and assisting international organizations in targeted interventions suggests a substantial return on investment. Moreover, its unique comparative advantage over other governance assessment tools, with its local-level focus and regular updates, further solidifies its value proposition. In essence and has been shown in the previous sections of this report, PAPI stands out as an impactful and resource-efficient tool in advancing governance and public administration in Vietnam.

* * *

Overall, the PAPI initiative demonstrates a good level of efficiency in its planning, financing, and implementation, providing good value for money. It operates through a collaborative model engaging diverse stakeholders and follows a meticulous nine-step process. The implementation timeline is well-established, with clear division of responsibilities between survey teams. The project generally exhibits high budget execution rates, nearing its allocated funding. While some variances exist, overall the initiative is commendable for its organized structure, expertise, and adaptability, reflected in its ability to stay relevant and responsive to Vietnam's evolving governance landscape. Monitoring mechanisms like output indicators, methodology reviews, and progress reports ensure continued effectiveness. To mitigate the risks that exist relating to political interference and data manipulation, UNDP and the PAPI partners will need to formulate a contingency plan with explicit mitigation measures.

3.5. Sustainability

The fact that the PAPI initiative has been running successfully for the past 15 years speaks for its sustainability. As a uniquely long-running initiative, PAPI's success with its sustainability is not related only to its relevance

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[20] As of 12 Oct 2023.

(virtue and usefulness), but also a number of additional factors are that are crucial for PAPI to be able to run in Vietnam. The following are some crucial factors of sustainability worth noting here.

- *Political Will*: A political environment that enables transparency and public scrutiny at the local or national level is a necessary condition for the existence of a survey like PAPI. In the context of Vietnam, such an environment requires a strong top-down political will, which is absolutely necessary for the operation of the PAPI survey across the country, the acceptance of results by relevant government entities and the implementation of policy changes based on PAPI findings. The political will creates the conditions for a supportive legal environment that formally recognizes and accommodates citizen participation in governance, which is a crucial aspect of the receptivity of PAPI in the country. Furthermore, the local governments' buy-in is also largely shaped by this political will that emanates from the top. So, a key condition that has allowed the PAPI survey to run for the past 15 years has been the political will in the country. This is a crucial factor that will be further required for PAPI to continue to deliver its benefits.

- *Committed and Professional Team*: One particular feature of PAPI that has remained unchanged from the day it started has been the core group of people that started it. This core group, which includes a team leader from UNDP, two international academic experts, and the founders of CECODES and RTA, has been a constant since the initiative's inception. Their enduring commitment and unwavering focus have lent the initiative a level of stability and continuity that is critical for long-term sustainability. The significance of this dedicated team goes beyond mere administrative or intellectual oversight. They have served as the custodians of the initiative's integrity and its methodological robustness. Their consistent involvement has ensured that the initiative does not deviate from its core objectives, while adapting to new challenges and opportunities. This team has over time become a real repository of institutional knowledge that is indispensable for maintaining the initiative's quality, relevance, and credibility over time.

- *Navigating a Complex Political Landscape*: Another key factor of PAPI's sustainability has been the skillfulness with which the team has navigated Vietnam's complex political landscape. The team has been instrumental in establishing and nurturing relationships with key stakeholders, including government bodies, academic institutions, and international organizations. These relationships have not been just transactional but are deeply rooted in a shared vision for improved governance and public service delivery. The team's ability to secure buy-in from these diverse stakeholders has been crucial in acquiring both political and financial support, which have been key for the initiative's sustainability.

- *Methodological Reliability and Data Accuracy*: PAPI's relevance would have been limited (or even nil in a context like Vietnam's) had it not been based on a sound and rigorous methodology that enables the collection of accurate information. The credibility of PAPI has been closely tied upon the reliability and accuracy of its data, which is a result of a rigorous methodology, unbiased data collection, and a transparent review process. PAPI's methodological basis and execution process has been tested and refined continuously over the past 15 years.

- *Commitment to Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women*: Another factor of PAPI's sustainability is its commitment to collecting gender-specific data, which indicates a long-term focus on addressing gender disparities in governance. By concentrating to the strategy of boosting the electability of women and expanding its inclusion to the LGBTQI+ community, PAPI's ongoing effort indicating a comprehensive and forward-looking approach to promoting diversity and empowerment.

- *Awareness and Education (Training)*: Another key factor of PAPI's sustainability has been the ongoing effort by the team to build awareness among the public and public officials on the value and findings of PAPI. To this end, the PAPI team has been proactive in conducting targeted promotion events and diagnostic workshops, specifically at the provincial level, to engage directly with the key officials responsible for public administration and service delivery. These workshops have served a dual purpose: they not only have provided an avenue for sharing the latest findings but have also operated as mini-training centers where officials have learned to interpret PAPI data within the context of their jurisdiction's performance, thereby facilitating evidence-based decision-making. Additionally, public awareness campaigns and educational programmes have been important for building a broader understanding and acceptance of PAPI's role in

governance. This public awareness not only legitimizes the efforts of the initiative, but also creates a positive pressure on the government bodies to engage with PAPI more constructively.

- *Funding and Resources*: Another key factor of PAPI's long-term sustainability has been the availability of adequate and consistent funding by a number of development partners, including Australia, Ireland, Switzerland, Spain and UNDP itself. The historical financial supporters of PAPI are shown in the box below. This funding has supported not just the data collection process, but also the dissemination, advocacy, and training components that make the information generated by PAPI actionable. Given PAPI's track record and credibility, there is a strong basis upon which to build a robust financial sustainability plan. While the initiative has historically relied on several funding sources, there are opportunities to further enhance financial stability. To mitigate the risks associated with dependency on a few key donors, PAPI could explore more proactively partnerships with additional governments, international organizations, and foundations interested in governance and public policy.

Box 5: Historical Sources of PAPI's Financing

- The Government of Australia (2018 - 2025) (with major additional funding for PAPI towards 2025)
- The Government of Ireland (2018 –2023) (with additional funding for PAPI in 2023)
- United Nations Development Programme (2009-2025)
- Provincial government funding for diagnostic workshops in provinces every year since 2015
- The Government of Switzerland (2011 - 2017)
- The Government of Spain (2009 - 2010)

Going Forward – How can PAPI's sustainability be strengthened?

A recurring question concerning the long-term sustainability of the PAPI initiative is whether its management should transition from UNDP to a national entity to enhance local ownership. This issue is not new and has been discussed in every review of the initiative. The MTR team paid particular attention to this question. Stakeholders almost universally felt that the key challenge with a potential transfer is that it has direct implications for the independence of the data collection and analysis. While greater national ownership could boost the survey's longevity and integration into policy-making, it also poses risks to the impartiality and credibility of the data. This trade-off between national ownership and independence is illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 16: National Ownership vs. Independence
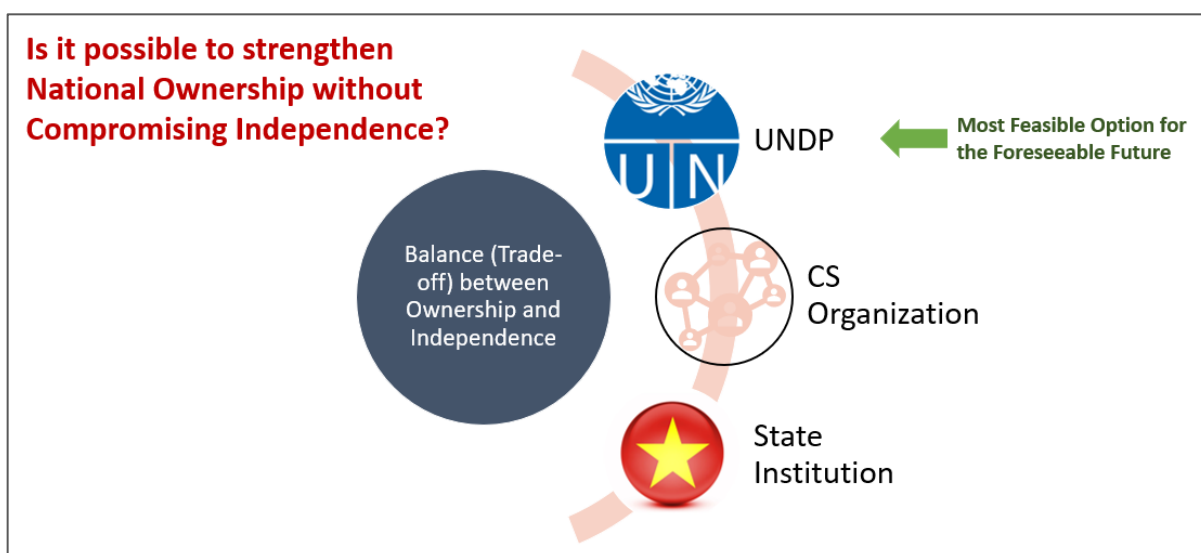
The MTR team considered three options for the sustainability of the PAPI initiative:

- **Continued UNDP Execution**: This option, while limiting in terms of full national ownership, has thus far provided a reliable mechanism for balancing national ownership and independence. As an international entity, UNDP possesses the neutrality to ensure that the initiative remains unbiased. Its long-standing expertise in governance and development bolsters the methodological rigor of PAPI. Furthermore, UNDP's existing in-country networks and partnerships are instrumental in achieving broader stakeholder buy-in.

- **Transfer to a Civil Society Organization**: Theoretically, civil society organizations could serve as another potential vehicle for sustaining PAPI, as they inherently possess a degree of independence and are rooted in on-the-ground realities. However, all MTR participants indicated that in the context of Vietnam no CSO is capable of taking over PAPI at this point in time. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, there seems to be general consensus among civil society stakeholders that the space for civil society has become more restrictive recently, especially after COVID-19. Secondly, no CSO in Vietnam has the capabilities to manage the highly intensive process that PAPI involves. Even CECODES, the local CSO that has been involved with PAPI from day one, expressed their inability to manage the PAPI initiative on their own. Thirdly, there are significant risks associated with the operation of PAPI by a CSO in the context of Vietnam. The operating environment for CSOs is highly volatile and unpredictable, and the pressure a CSO might encounter at a particular point in time might be insurmountable. CSOs do not have the clout, immunity and resources to withstand pressures at the scale that UNDP could.

- **Transfer to a State Institution**: Transferring the management of the PAPI initiative to a state institution will significantly enhance national ownership and has the potential to provide it with greater financial stability. However, the significant risk that this option entails is that it could highly compromise the independence of PAPI, given the elevated risks of political interference or data manipulation.

Based on multiple discussions of this particular topic conducted in the course of the MTR, there seems to be universal consensus among the stakeholders that the most feasible option for the foreseeable future is to keep

PAPI under the management of UNDP, as is currently the case. This is the best option for ensuring sustainability without compromising independence. UNDP's global credibility, combined with its non-partisan stance, make it well-suited for this role. Moreover, it has the capacity to collaborate effectively with both state institutions and civil society, offering a hybrid approach to strengthen national ownership while preserving independence.

A key question that flows from the discussion above it: ***Can national ownership of PAPI be strengthened while leaving its management to UNDP***? The answer to this question is a clear Yes. This is an answer widely shared by the participants of this MTR, who emphasized the need for strengthened engagement with influential political actors and civil society.

<u>Strengthened Engagement of Influential Political Actors</u>

Several of these participants made the point that the sustainability of PAPI will be significantly enhanced by securing stronger political backing. From this perspective, it is essential to identify potential champions within the government who would be committed to advocate for the importance and credibility of PAPI. Options for such champions could be at a higher echelon within VFF, the National Assembly, MOHA, or MPI. The following are some key insights that emerged in the course of the MTR.

- First of all, it should be noted that the national institution that is most closely associated with PAPI is the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF).[21] This organization plays a critical role in the PAPI initiative as a convener and facilitator, particularly at the grassroots level. As a mass organization that serves as a bridge between the Communist Party, the government, and the citizenry, VFF is instrumental in legitimizing the initiative and ensuring wide-scale participation. It leverages its extensive networks to facilitate field surveys and data collection, thus enabling PAPI to reach a diverse demographic, including remote and marginalized communities. The organization's engagement is critical in not only executing the surveys, but also in the post-data collection phase, where it contributes to provincial diagnostic workshops and action plan development aimed at improving governance and public service delivery.

- While crucial for the conduct of the survey, many MTR participants noted that the engagement of VFF with the PAPI initiative has been primarily at the lower levels – the VFF committees that facilitate the data collection at the village level and VFF's Center for Research and Training (CRT) that serves as PAPI's main counterpart at the technical level. Higher-level engagement of VFF with the PAPI initiative has been limited.[22]

- One thing that could be tried by UNDP to increase the level of national ownership of PAPI is to increase the intensity of engagement of higher-levels of VFF with the PAPI initiative. This will require more proactive steps from the side of the UNDP management in trying to build a stronger rapport with the VFF leadership, understanding their perceptions of PAPI and trying to promote a more active role of the VFF leadership in the initiative.

- Another important institution that has the potential to exert greater ownership of PAPI is the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI),[23] given its mandate over strategic national planning, economic development, and investment prioritization. The PAPI team already collaborates with MPI's National Innovation Center for Local Initiatives. MPI also uses PAPI data and research for the preparation of Vietnam's Voluntary National Reviews, which report the country's achievement of SDGs. The MTR team met with MPI, and its representative saw potential and seemed interested in greater collaboration with PAPI. This has to also translate in greater interest from the leadership of MPI. Overall, it might be worthwhile for UNDP to pursue closer collaboration with MPI, as this ministry could facilitate PAPI's further

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[21] The Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF) is a political organization in Vietnam that operates under the guidance of the Communist Party of Vietnam. It serves as an umbrella group for various mass organizations, social organizations, and individuals. The VFF aims to build national unity and represents the political base of people's power. It serves as a bridge between the Communist Party, the government, and the citizenry, facilitating political and social activities that include election monitoring, social advocacy, and public mobilization.

[22] As another example of the limitations of VFF's engagement with PAPI, the MTR was not able to obtain a meeting with this important institution for this review.

[23] The Ministry of Planning and Investment, formerly the Committee of State Planning, is a governmental ministry charged with the role of state management over planning and investment.

institutionalization within Vietnam's public policy landscape. It would further enhance the initiative's visibility and credibility at high governmental levels, particularly during the stages of budget allocations and policy prioritizations. This, in turn, could secure more stable financial and political support for the initiative, strengthening its sustainability in the long run. Further, MPI's more active involvement could serve as an effective conduit for disseminating PAPI findings to various other government departments and agencies.

- Furthermore, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, and the National Assembly each have unique capabilities that, if further engaged, could significantly amplify the impact and reach of the PAPI initiative.

  o Greater engagement with MOHA can lead to a more integrated approach to reforming public administration, as MOHA can incorporate PAPI findings into its policy recommendations and administrative guidelines. In addition, MOHA's wide network of local governmental units is a critical asset that can help facilitate deeper penetration of PAPI's insights at the provincial and communal levels. The challenge with MOHA is that it operates its own governance surveys - PAR-Index and SIPAS.[24] While the PAPI team has been invited by MOHA to present findings together in a few provincial diagnostic workshops, greater collaboration is hampered by the fact that MOHA is interested in promoting its own instruments.

  o The Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics serves as the leading institution for political and administrative training in Vietnam. Its involvement can not only contribute academically rigorous insights to the research, but also disseminate PAPI findings through its training programs for high-ranking Party and State officials. This would ensure that decision-makers at the highest levels are cognizant of the on-the-ground administrative performance, and the challenges that must be addressed. Moreover, the academy's research capabilities could be leveraged for deep dives into specialized governance topics that can add layers of sophistication to the PAPI methodology and findings.

  o The National Assembly plays a crucial role as the legislative body of Vietnam, and its enhanced engagement with PAPI can offer several advantages. The Assembly has already shown interest for PAPI and has been keen on receiving PAPI reports before the May session. But according to some MTR participants there is potential for greater engagement. By integrating PAPI results into the Assembly's oversight functions, lawmakers can become better equipped to monitor the executive's performance in public administration. The public reporting and discussions around PAPI in the National Assembly could heighten its profile, thereby giving the initiative a platform for greater impact. This will provide the legislative framework to not only react to PAPI findings, but to proactively shape policies that can improve public administration and governance in Vietnam.

In general, UNDP's immediate focus should be on strengthening the engagement of higher levels of the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF) with the PAPI initiative. At the same time, UNDP could explore with MPI a new and expanded role for this institution, gauging the extent to which MPI could become a greater supporter of PAPI. In parallel, concerted efforts must continue to engage the other above-mentioned entities – MOHA, the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, and the National Assembly – through high-level discussions and consultations. Achieving broader and deeper impact will require greater political support, potentially involving champions from governmental institutions. High-level political support will ensure that PAPI's findings and recommendations are translated more effectively into actionable policy reforms. In this context, political backing is crucial for expediting the integration of PAPI's insights into governmental priorities and legislative agendas. Political backing will also serve as a risk mitigation strategy, particularly if the operational environment becomes more restrictive. Support from influential institutions can act as a safeguard against external pressures that could compromise the survey's independence and integrity.

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[24] UNDP has actually supported MOHA in developing the PAR-Index. Furthermore, MOHA has relied on PAPI's Dimension 5 for the development of the SIPAS survey.

<u>Strengthened Engagement of Civil Society</u>

As noted in previous sections of this report, in the last few years, PAPI has experienced an expansion of its agenda into the realms of policy research and advocacy. At the same time, this has been accompanied by greater engagement with local civil society organizations. Several MTR participants noted that PAPI is the UNDP programme with the most engagement with civil society in Vietnam. Its collaboration with civil society has included names such as CEPEW, CECODES, VESS, IPS, MDRI, CDI, ECUE, etc. In previous human rights periodical reviews, the Human Rights Working Group and People Participation Working Group consulted and used PAPI data for the civil society shadow reports. In recent years, PAPI has strengthened considerably its cooperation with research institutes and advocacy organizations in support of persons with disabilities (PwDs). The following are some recent examples of such engagement by the PAPI initiative.

- PAPI has engaged the Mekong Development Research Institute (MDRI) to conduct quantitative and qualitative surveys with 2,115 PwDs (in 2023) with all forms of disabilities, from 18 provinces and from various ethnic groups, gender and age groups, and localities across the country.
- PAPI has worked with the Can Tho Association of Persons with Disabilities (CAPD) for the collection of data of 26,416 PWDs from 48 provinces. The data are used to inform the annual assessment on disability inclusion in local governance from 2023.
- PAPI supported the Vietnam Federation on Disability (VFD) in launching a call for applications for the training programme to foster promote the participation of people with disabilities PWDs in elected bodies. The call attracted 155 applications from PWDs across the country, from which, 105 were selected from the screening, written test and interview for the basic training course conducted in 2023.

While PAPI has expanded its engagement with civil society, especially in the research dimension, the role of civil society in the advocacy and dialogue dimension could be further strengthened. A serious challenge to this is the increasingly restrictive environment for NGOs, especially in the last couple of years. However, despite these constraints, PAPI should continue its efforts to further engage CSOs in its activities. For example, establishing regular independent reviews of provincial performance with the participation of CSOs would provide an additional layer of scrutiny alongside PAPI's official assessment. A more proactive role for NGOs and community groups in these reviews can foster a culture of transparency and accountability. Despite tightening regulations, some civil society groups could still examine governance gaps using PAPI metrics as a benchmark. Such external report cards can further promote accountability at the provincial level. Furthermore, equipping civil society organizations with PAPI findings, research capabilities, and platforms to amplify their voices can improve targeted advocacy. Though facing constraints, civil society still wields tools like investigative journalism that could trace PAPI indicators down to lived realities within communities. While acknowledging the existing challenges, PAPI could maximize the existing space for cooperative initiatives that allow civil society monitoring and citizen-centered policy dialogue.

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PAPI has succeeded thanks to several key factors, especially strong political will that has facilitated transparency and public scrutiny, the unwavering commitment and professionalism of its core team, and its ability to maintain relationships with diverse stakeholders, ensuring crucial political and financial support. The initiative's credibility hinges on its rigorous methodology, yielding reliable and accurate data. PAPI's commitment to gender equality and inclusive data collection, alongside its continual efforts in public awareness and education, has broadened its governance impact. Despite the challenges created by the restrictive environment for NGOs, PAPI's engagement with civil society, especially in supporting persons with disabilities, has expanded its research scope and advocacy potential. To ensure long-term sustainability and balance national ownership with independence, continuing PAPI under UNDP's management is deemed most viable, supported by proactive engagement with influential Vietnamese institutions and political actors. This approach will enable PAPI to navigate the complex governance landscape effectively.

3.6. Cross-cutting Themes

This section presents an overview of the assessment of the project against cross-cutting themes such as the Human Rights Based Approach, Gender Mainstreaming, Environmental Sustainability, and Disability Inclusion.

<u>Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA), Gender Mainstreaming and Disability Inclusion</u>

The PAPI initiative has over time had an increasingly significant focus on inclusivity, fully in line the principles of HRBA.

- First and foremost, the PAPI initiative emphasizes inclusive governance and citizen participation, key HRBA elements. PAPI's approach fully reflects the HRBA principle of active and meaningful participation, ensuring that all stakeholders, especially the most marginalized, have a voice in governance and public administration processes.
- Secondly, PAPI has an exclusive focus on the promotion of accountability in the public sector. This reflects the HRBA principle of holding political actors accountable for their actions. The transparent monitoring and validation processes ensure checks and balances, reinforcing accountability mechanisms.
- Furthermore, the PAPI initiative has placed significant emphasis on the four groups identified in the figure below – women, migrants, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities. Working with these groups, the PAPI team has placed a strong emphasis on diversity and inclusivity to improve the situation of these vulnerable populations. By targeting these often-marginalized groups, PAPI highlights the importance of addressing the unique needs and challenges they face and has ensured that the focus remains on inclusivity and that the needs and perspectives of marginalized populations are continually considered.

Figure 17: PAPI's Inclusive Nature
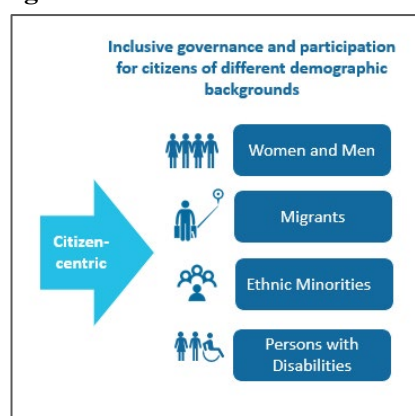
The following are some key benefits highlighted by MTR participants for the four marginalized groups that have received particular attention by the PAPI initiative.

PAPI has made increasing efforts for the collection of gender-specific data through the survey, which is useful in elucidating the differential impacts of public administration on men and women. This data is essential for policy formulation aimed at gender parity in governance. PAPI team integrates gender considerations as a lens for analysis, underscoring the programme's commitment to inclusivity and social justice. The PAPI initiative has also worked to promote women in politics, especially before and after the 2021 elections. PAPI has unique strengths compared to similar activities, because its survey asks people about their willingness to vote for female candidates to the elected bodies. Analyzing people's perception about male/female candidates helps tailor capacity building programmes to boost electability of female candidates. Another important recent step has been the decision of the PAPI to team to start the collection of indicators for Vietnam's LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Index for SDG reporting and advocating for legal rights of the LGBTIQ+ to contribute to Vietnam's first-ever initiative to have a Law on Gender Affirmation.

The inclusion of ethnic minority perspectives in the survey has provided deeper insights into local governance challenges and has enabled more context-sensitive policy-making. The work to leverage access to modern but inclusive e-services for ethnic minorities was enabled additional funding from the Embassy of Ireland. Since

2021, the initiative conducted research on conditions for ethnic minorities' access to the public administrative services in three provinces with large ethnic minority population. The studies have provided central and local government agencies in charge of e-services with evidence and recommendations for improvement so that ethnic minority people in these provinces can enjoy the benefits of modern public services in the same manner with the majority Kinh people in the provinces. Based on these findings, the Ha Giang and Quang Tri provinces sent UNDP proposals for technical and financial support to improve public services in selected ethnic minority districts.

Given their unique challenges in accessing public services, incorporating the views of migrants in the PAPI survey since 2020 has offered a more comprehensive portrayal of governance efficiency and inclusivity. Also, in 2023 the PAPI initiative has commenced looking into migration within the two delta regions of the Red River and the Mekong River to understand push and pull factors of internal migrants and how local governments should prepare themselves to meet the migrants' needs.

The PAPI initiative has recently expanded its focus to be more inclusive of persons with disabilities (PwDs) in Vietnam. Since 2022, the PAPI research and advocacy project has included in its annual workplan towards 2025 a component on Disability Inclusion Research and Advocacy.[25] This reflects a recognition that PwDs face systemic barriers in accessing public services and participating in governance and need targeted efforts to have their voices heard. In 2022, with additional funding support from DFAT and the Embassy of Ireland, PAPI conducted several new activities centered on disability inclusion.

- First, the PAPI team has carried out surveys specifically on PwDs' experiences and perceptions of local government performance across various dimensions like transparency, accountability, and service delivery. The surveys generate evidence on where local governments are falling short in supporting PwDs.
- Second, PAPI has organized training and recruitment sessions for PwDs interested in running for elected office in future elections at all levels of government.[26] By providing training and mentorship to equip PwD candidates, PAPI aims to increase political representation of this marginalized group over time.
- Third, PAPI has convened dialogues with policymakers, researchers, PwD organizations and individual PwDs to discuss research findings and strategies to promote greater participation of PwDs in government bodies.

The new research and training programmes, and policy advocacy centered on PwDs reflect a strategic prioritization by PAPI to be more inclusive of this layer of the society. The initiative is leveraging its platform to amplify PwD voices, build a talent pipeline of future PwD leaders, and drive reforms for more disability-inclusive governance and public services in Vietnam.

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[25] The component aims to make national strategies and policies on disaster response and recovery and social-economic development more disability-inclusive and fully protect the rights of the most vulnerable, including PWDs, elected representatives with disabilities must be present in the National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels.

[26] PAPI has organized three training and recruitment sessions focused on persons with disabilities. These sessions identified and mentored potential candidates with disabilities to run for elected office in the 2026-2030 elections at the national, provincial, district and commune levels in Vietnam. By training and recruiting persons with disabilities as candidates, PAPI aims to increase the political representation of this marginalized group.

Figure 18: PAPI's Demographic Trends
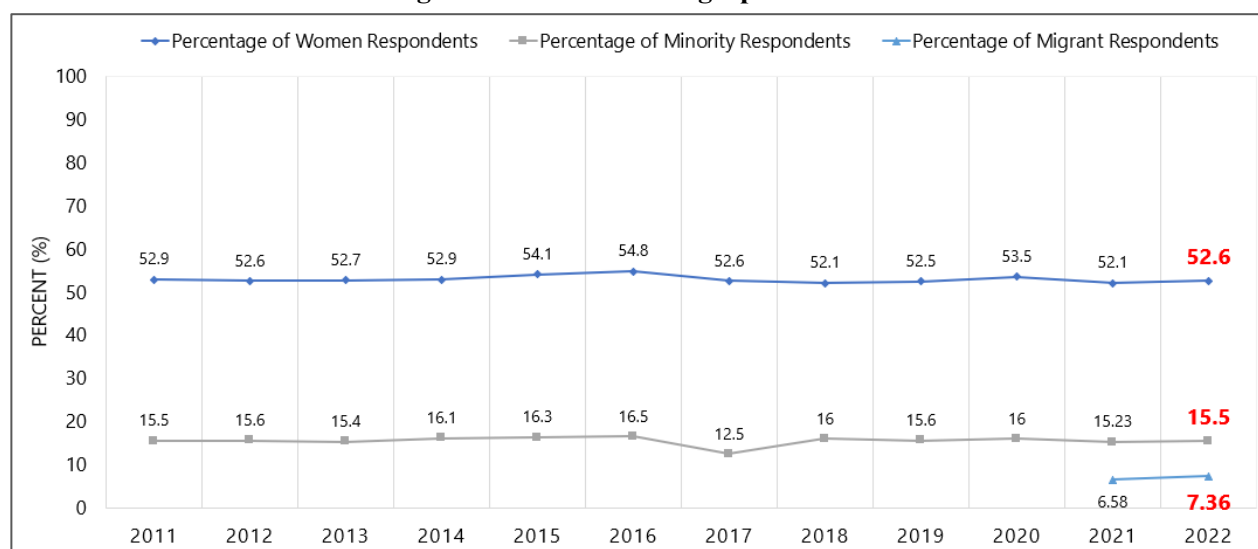
PAPI's focus on vulnerable populations can also be seen from the figure above which shows the evaluation of the key demographic trends captured by the survey in the period 2011-2022. Throughout its lifetime, women have represented more than 50% of PAPI respondents, whereas starting from 2021 the PAPI team has expanded to the scope of the survey to include representatives of minorities and migrant population as part of the respondents, thus ensuring the inclusion of their voices in survey results.

As part of its evolution process, PAPI has become more inclusive – especially since 2020 – with its research agenda expanded to cover ethnic minorities, migrants, persons with disabilities and persons with diverse gender identity as participants and beneficiaries. This has been enabled by the additional financial support from DFAT and the Embassy of Ireland in 2021 and 2022 in particular. Beyond its data generation effect, PAPI has also promoted and produced crucial research on salient themes such as inclusivity, citizen participation, gender equity, and more. This research-driven approach has ensured that advocacy efforts in the country are underpinned by credible findings. As can be seen from the box below, in the period 2012-2023, the PAPI initiative has tackled a wide array of relevant topics ranging from informal payments and equality in access to governance to more contemporary issues such as the COVID-19 impact on local governance and land governance issues.[27] This thematic diversity not only enriches the initiative's analytical depth, but also enhances its utility for multiple stakeholders, thereby bolstering its efficacy and impact in public policy discourse and governance improvement.

Box 6: Special Issues Covered by the 2012-2022 PAPI Reports

- Informal Payments in Viet Nam (2012 PAPI Report)
- Equality in Access to Governance and Public Services within Provinces (with a gender lens) (2013 PAPI Report)
- Strengthening PAPI Reliability (2014 PAPI Report)
- Citizen Political Participation (with a gender lens) (2015 PAPI Report)
- Poverty, Environment, Trans-Pacific Agreements (with a gender lens) (2016 PAPI Report)
- Poverty, Environment, E-governance (2017 PAPI Report)
- Economic Inequality, Economic-Environment Trade-offs, Gender and Leadership (2018 PAPI Report)
- Gender and Leadership before 2021 Election (2019 PAPI Report)
- COVID-19 Impact on Local Governance and Governance and Migration (2020 PAPI Report issued in April 2021)
- Migration and Governance (2021 PAPI Report issued in May 2022)
- Land Governance Issues (2022 PAPI Report issued in April 2023)

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[27] The Land Transparency Initiative, which received additional funding from the Embassy of Ireland in 2022, revealed important findings that are evidence to understand the gaps between the 2016 Law on Access to Information and the 2013 Land Law and to suggest policy implications for the amendments of the Land Law in 2022 and 2023.

PAPI's focus on human rights related issues can also be seen in the list of PAPI's priority areas for year 2022, which are illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 19: PAPI's Focus Areas in 2022
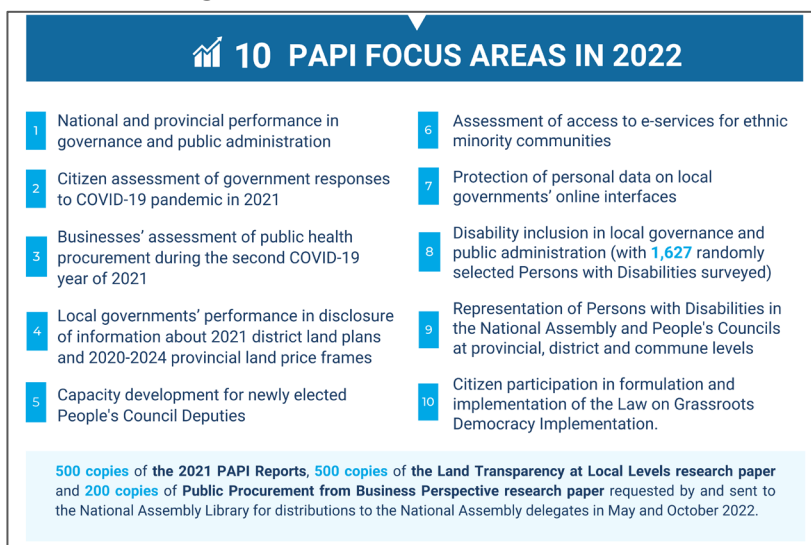
In general, while PAPI has taken a human-rights based approach in its activities and has contributed significantly to the advancement of the rights of vulnerable groups, MTR interviews indicated that there is room for greater contributions in two specific areas.

- First of all, there is potential for the PAPI initiative to delve deeper into the realities facing women in Vietnam through its research programme. Such research could provide richer insights into how women experience governance outcomes across different domains measured by PAPI. Studies focused on women could uncover more nuanced barriers and their root causes to accessing public services, justice, business permits, etc. This would illuminate opportunities for policy and programming to better serve women's needs. In addition, PAPI's dataset could be analyzed through an intersectional lens to reveal variations based on ethnicity, income, disability and other factors overlapping with gender. Disaggregating the data and experience of marginalized women would further inform promotion of their rights and status. Beyond research, PAPI is also well positioned to promote initiatives that expand good practices that promote gender equality, build women's confidence and political participation. Media campaigns, leadership training programmes and mentoring networks with current female officials could encourage more women to pursue politics and governance roles. Partnerships with civil society could also leverage PAPI data for targeted advocacy campaigns promoting gender equality within provinces found to be lagging. With its authoritative data and nonpartisan voice, PAPI has real potential to catalyze social change empowering women. Moving beyond data collection to in-depth gender research and programming could significantly advance women's standing and influence in Vietnam's governance.

- Secondly, there is an opportunity to further promote the use of PAPI data and findings as evidence and means of verification for human rights related work by the Government of Vietnam (e.g., the Human Rights Universal Periodical Review by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Vietnam Sustainable Development Goals Report or the Voluntary National Review by the Ministry of Planning and Investment, etc.). To promote such uptake, the PAPI team could proactively share relevant indicators, data snapshots and policy briefs with relevant government officials. Orientation sessions could also help familiarize officials with accessing and applying PAPI data to strengthen their reporting with independent verification.

Promotion of Innovative Solutions

The inclusion of an e-governance module in the PAPI initiative represents an important step in keeping pace with Vietnam's rapidly digitizing governance landscape. As public sector functions shift online, measuring the effectiveness and inclusiveness of digital platforms through PAPI provides data to inform policies around digital transformation. Specifically, the e-governance component enables PAPI to evaluate the uptake and quality of

e-services across provinces. This data is useful for highlighting disparities in digital access faced by marginalized groups. PAPI Advisory Board members praised the increasing importance of digital governance in the PAPI initiative and the critical role of digitalization in the public administration realm.

To complement the e-governance research, the PAPI initiative has engaged in targeted initiatives to expand vulnerable groups' access. PAPI's Citizen Powered Innovation Initiative (CPII) provides local governments with technical assistance and capabilities in innovation to transit to more modern, effective governance institutions. CPII selects and supports provinces that facilitate user-first public services and engage in digital transformation. As noted above, the three provinces of Tay Ninh, Ha Giang and Quang Tri have received support from CPII. The action-based research and technical advice activity was reiterated to assist provinces with large populations of ethnic minorities to revisit e-services and make them work for ethnic monitories and provides while providing evidence for CPII to look for innovative ideas from the provinces to improve the services.

PAPI's collaborative empirical research with the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics is another example of joint work to uncover barriers and solutions to improve e-services for underserved communities. Another example is the work on building digital literacy and e-participation skills through specialized training programmes to empower these groups to utilize e-services. Additionally, the PAPI initiative has focused on developing user-friendly digital interfaces and outreach to boost awareness of e-platforms as a way of enhancing accessibility. Combining diagnostic data with proactive capacity building and research focused on vulnerable populations' inclusion is a great example of how evidence-based policies are used to close the digital divide.

As Vietnam continues embracing e-government, PAPI is well-positioned to continue its support to ensure that the digitization improves access and quality of public services for all. PAPI holds unique potential to spearhead inclusive digital transformation that strengthens transparency, responsiveness, and public access at the grassroots level.

Environmental Sustainability

Although this is a marginal dimension for PAPI, the addition of an environmental module to the survey has provided critical data to guide sustainable development policies in Vietnam's provinces. As climate change and environmental degradation emerge as defining challenges worldwide, expanding PAPI's scope to include environmental governance is timely and impactful. PAPI's comprehensive insights enable tailored interventions to improve provincial-level environmental governance, targeting specific gaps. Moreover, the environmental component enables PAPI to directly inform policy aligned with the SDGs. PAPI now wields data to steer Vietnam's provinces toward more sustainable, climate-resilient trajectories.

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In conclusion, the PAPI initiative displays a commendable alignment with several HRBA principles. The project's focus on participation, accountability, and inclusivity showcases its commitment to a human rights-centric approach. However, there is potential for greater focus on gender equality and policy areas such as digital transformation and e-governance.

4. LESSONS LEARNED

The following are two key lessons drawn from the experience of the PAPI initiative for the benefit of other individuals and institutions interested in similar governance initiatives. These are lessons that the PAPI experience has generated and which will benefit the implementation of other similar initiatives, especially in institutional and political environments similar to Vietnam's.

Lesson 1: Maintaining a Balance between National Ownership and Independence

A key lesson that can be drawn from PAPI's experience is the critical importance of maintaining a balance between national ownership and operational independence in governance assessment initiatives. National ownership is fundamental for ensuring that a governance assessment programme like PAPI is not only accepted but also effectively utilized within the country's specific context. When national entities, whether from the government or civil society, perceive the initiative as their own, they are more likely to engage with its findings constructively. This local engagement is vital for the initiative's integration into the national governance framework, ensuring that its insights are directly relevant to the country's unique challenges and needs.

While national ownership ensures relevance and integration, the independence of the initiative is crucial for maintaining its credibility and impartiality. Operational independence means that the initiative's methodology, data collection, analysis, research and reporting are free from local political or other biases. This independence is what gives the findings and recommendations of the initiative their legitimacy and trustworthiness. It ensures that the data collected is accurate, the analysis is unbiased, and the conclusions drawn are objective. This is particularly important in environments where political sensitivities may otherwise influence the outcomes of such assessments.

The experience of PAPI shows that striking a balance between these two aspects is not straightforward but is essential for the success of governance assessment initiatives. On the one hand, too much local control without sufficient safeguards can compromise the initiative's independence, risking its credibility. On the other hand, complete external control can lead to perceptions of irrelevance or imposition, limiting its acceptance and practical utility.

Lesson 2: Political Sensitivities Require Careful Navigation

Governance assessment initiatives like PAPI may encounter political resistance, especially in more restricted political environments. PAPI's experience in Vietnam shows that findings may sometimes contradict official narratives. This demonstrates the need for careful navigation when results are politically sensitive.

- First, the act of independent data collection, research and advocacy may be seen as challenging authority. Initiatives such as PAPI should establish transparent, apolitical methodologies and consult extensively with stakeholders to build trust.
- Second, robust communication strategies should anticipate pushback scenarios with prepared mitigation responses. Pre-releasing results to key groups can gauge reactions and identify potential concerns.
- Third, constructive framing is essential as it focuses on improvements, not critiques of power structures. Presenting data as a tool for better governance defuses tension.
- Finally, external validation from respected third parties adds credibility against dismissal. International collaborations, such as the experts involved in the design of the methodology, reinforce methodological integrity.

The reality is political sensitivity is intrinsic in restricted contexts and a major contextual factor when it comes to initiatives like PAPI. But with thoughtful transparency, communication, framing, and third-party/expert validation, governance assessments can maintain their integrity and maximize their impact. Anticipating challenges and responding tactfully are two additional essential requirements for navigating political pressure.

Lesson 3: Importance of Data Quality Assurance

Another lesson that may be drawn from the PAPI experience is that robust data quality assurance process is imperative for governance assessments like PAPI, impacting their credibility, influence, and sustainability.

Rigorous protocols must be established at all stages of the process, from enumerator training to statistical analysis. Compromising on quality undermines trustworthiness and policy impact.

- Firstly, data quality is tied directly to the credibility and perceived integrity of the initiative. Flawed data can erode confidence in the initiative itself and governance institutions.
- Secondly, high-quality data inform better policies by providing valid evidence. Poor data lead to misguided reforms. This makes quality assurance crucial for policy change.
- Thirdly, reliable data are more relevant to diverse stakeholders for decision-making and advocacy. Weak data diminish the utility of the information.
- Fourthly, consistent data enables meaningful longitudinal analysis of trends over time. Unreliable data introduces compounding errors that only get worse with the passing of time.
- Fifthly, risks must be preemptively mitigated through training, sampling, and analytical choices.
- Finally, transparency about methodologies and limitations is crucial as it contributes to overall data quality and trust.

For an initiative like PAPI, rigorous and independent quality assurance protocols are non-negotiable. They enable credible analyses, well-informed policies, stakeholder buy-in, longitudinal insights, risk mitigation, and transparency. For sustainable, impactful governance initiatives, upholding data quality is an absolute imperative.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The following are the MTR's main conclusions organized according to the MTR criteria and aligned with the MTR questions identified in the MTR's Terms of Reference.

Relevance

As this report has demonstrated, PAPI has established itself as an authoritative source of reliable data, research and advocacy on local governance in Vietnam. Its ability to operate continuously for 15 years despite political constraints is a noteworthy accomplishment that speaks to the credibility it has established over time. PAPI provides a multidimensional diagnostic of provincial governance through its ecosystem of data, research, and capacity building initiatives. This comprehensive approach enables PAPI to offer 360-degree insights into local governance matters. By regularly adapting its approach and methodology and expanding its scope, PAPI has maintained strong alignment with Vietnam's evolving policy landscape and governance needs. This adaptability has been critical to PAPI's ongoing relevance. PAPI strengthens accountability and transparency by empowering citizens with metrics to evaluate local government performance and demand better services. Its granular, citizen-generated data and research provides invaluable insights for provincial governments to benchmark performance and formulate evidence-based policies. By capturing the perspectives of marginalized groups, PAPI gives voice to sections of society whose governance experiences often remain unheard. With PAPI's relevance already established, the main task for the PAPI team going forward will be to preserve this relevance by maintaining the quality of surveying and research, and most importantly by preserving the integrity and independence of the initiative.

Effectiveness and Impact

PAPI's conceptual framework, rigorous methodology, and sound execution have enabled it to produce high-quality data and research on local governance in Vietnam. By pioneering objective governance assessments, PAPI has promoted participatory, transparent and accountable governance. PAPI has also become a credible evidence-based instrument for policymaking. This MTR provides evidence of the use of PAPI data and research across diverse stakeholder groups, which confirms its multi-dimensional utility. Undoubtedly, PAPI has promoted among government stakeholders greater openness to independent citizen feedback on governance. This shift in mindset is an important achievement.

While PAPI acts as an effective diagnostic and policy advocacy tool, its impact on tangible improvements in provincial governance and service delivery can be further strengthened through more targeted capacity building and implementation support. There is potential for PAPI data and research to more directly inform strategies and programmes of provincial government departments, especially in sectors like health and education. Building analytical capacity within provincial governments will be key to translating PAPI findings into reforms. Targeted training and implementation support will amplify PAPI's impact.

Coherence

PAPI has established strong internal coherence through its rigorous methodology, division of labor among expert partners, and multi-stakeholder governance framework. This has enabled consistent, high-quality data collection, research and advocacy on provincial governance in Vietnam for over 15 years. While the proliferation of specialized governance surveys presents fragmentation risks, strategic coordination with complementary indices like PCI and PAR offers opportunities to extend PAPI's analytical power through synergistic collaboration on dissemination, consultations, task forces and pilot studies. Further situating PAPI as an integrative platform for targeted UNDP governance initiatives based on its provincial diagnostics can amplify its role in driving localized improvements. Overall, PAPI demonstrates admirable internal coherence,

but enhancing external coherence through partnerships with parallel governance tools can optimize resources and strengthen collective impact.

Efficiency

PAPI operates through an efficient collaborative framework that assigns clear responsibilities to all stakeholders – UNDP, government entities, civil society organizations and development partners. This arrangement leverages diverse expertise, while at the same time ensuring rigorous data and research through a well-structured process. Such clear division of labor optimizes efficiency. PAPI has exhibited adaptability in regularly refining its methodology and process to stay policy-relevant. While underspending has occurred in certain output areas, the overall budget execution is high. Key risks requiring ongoing mitigation include political interference and the possibility of data manipulation which could undermine PAPI's credibility. Supplementing external financing through strategic partnerships with additional partners will enhance sustainability. While PAPI demonstrates good organizational efficiency, amplifying impact will require sharpened risk management, funding diversification and greater policy support tailored to provincial diagnostics and policy-making.

Sustainability

PAPI's 15 years of continuous operation demonstrates sustainability enabled by factors like political will, a committed team, methodological rigor and adequate funding. However, transferring management from UNDP risks undermining PAPI's integrity and credibility through potential political interference. Strategically engaging high-level government champions will increase national buy-in, while retaining UNDP oversight. Fostering greater utilization by central state institutions will further embed findings in national strategies, enhancing stability. Although the space for civil society collaboration has been narrowing in recent years, PAPI's data and research has the potential to empower media and advocacy groups to more effectively monitor governance and promote accountability. Broadening partnerships with international donors and academic institutions represents an opportunity to boost financial sustainability, analytical capacity and impact. Overall, UNDP stewardship, balanced with heightened government engagement, remains the pragmatic approach for sustaining PAPI's viability and independence.

Cross-Cutting Themes

PAPI strongly aligns with human rights principles through its emphasis on inclusive governance, participation of marginalized groups, accountability and disability inclusion. Its focus on women, migrants, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities demonstrates a commitment to diversity, social justice and leaving no one behind. While generating useful provincial gender data, deeper intersectional research could further strengthen PAPI's gender equality focus. Complementary initiatives building e-accessibility for vulnerable groups aligns with PAPI's e-governance research to promote digital inclusion. The recent addition of an environmental module enables PAPI to directly inform more sustainable, climate-resilient provincial policies. PAPI's dynamic research agenda on emerging priorities like informal payments and COVID-19 impacts highlights its versatility as a catalyst for discourse. Overall, PAPI has evolved to progressively embrace human rights, inclusion and environmental sustainability - signalling its commitment to human-rights-based governance.

Going Forward

In addition to examining with hindsight the achievements of the PAPI initiative, this MTR also takes a look ahead and provides some suggestions on the way forward, drawing on the experiences and insights detailed in this report.

First of all, this review strongly advocates for the continued operation of PAPI, recognizing its substantial accumulated value and influence in shaping Vietnam's governance landscape, along with its role in inspiring other indices in the country. The discontinuation of PAPI would be a significant loss for the country.

Additionally, this review advocates for the maintenance of PAPI's current operational model under UNDP management, supported by the development partners. This approach is deemed most suitable given Vietnam's existing political constraints. It guarantees independence, integrity, and quality. Looking towards the long-term, transferring PAPI to national institutions should remain a strategic goal. However, this transition must be predicated upon clear and strong guarantees of PAPI's continued independence and integrity, which are essential for its effectiveness and credibility.

For much of its life, PAPI has been on an expansion trajectory, incorporating new components of work around the core survey and becoming a research programme. This MTR deems this expansion of PAPI a very positive feature because it adds significant value to the data generation process by directly influencing policy-making. Much of this expansion is owed to generous funding from Australia and Ireland. While the potential for more work is there and some of the opportunities are highlighted in the pages of this report, any attempts at further expansion must consider PAPI's financial limitations.

This MTR also makes the case for continued support from Australia and Ireland for PAPI. It also suggested that UNDP, Australia, and Ireland collaboratively seek opportunities to diversify PAPI's funding sources, ensuring continued and improved funding. Both Australia and Ireland have a vested interest in promoting good governance. Supporting PAPI aligns with their policy objectives of fostering transparent, accountable, and efficient governance in partner countries. PAPI is one of the best investments they can make in good governance in Vietnam, especially when considering PAPI's tangible benefits highlighted in previous sections of this report. The success of PAPI in Vietnam can serve as a model for similar initiatives in other countries. Continued support for PAPI enhances the visibility and recognition of Australia and Ireland as champions of innovative governance assessment tools.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section also includes recommendations that will be useful in the process of continuing and rebranding the PAPI programme. Although this is formally conceived as a mid-term assessment, the longevity and widening scope of PAPI have enabled the generation of many recommendations, all of which are relevant to various aspects of the programme. The MT team acknowledges upfront that while it is easy to provide recommendations in a report, implementing them in practice can be challenging, especially given Vietnam's political context where state entities have limited appetite for engaging with non-governmental initiatives.

Given the multitude of the recommendations, the MTR team decided to separate them in two groups – high-priority and low-priority ones, allowing the PAPI team and UNDP to focus on the most important and urgent ones, but at same time without losing sight of certain aspects of the programme that still require attention in the future. The recommendations are listed in the order of priority identified in discussions with PAPI stakeholders and the PAPI team.

One overarching recommendation provided by this evaluation that applies to all the parties involved with PAPI is that ***UNDP should maintain PAPI's management for the foreseeable future to balance national ownership and independence***.

High-priority Recommendations

The following are recommendations directly relevant to the PAPI Team.

- PAPI team should develop a *sounder results framework*, transitioning from an output-focused approach, such as the mere number of reports or events, to a results-oriented one that measures tangible effects on governance improvements. Additionally, the team should develop a well-articulated *theory of change* to map how PAPI's outputs, such as data and reports, directly contribute to intended outcomes, such as improvements in governance and social inclusion.

- To ensure PAPI's data quality and assessment neutrality, PAPI team should maintain high vigilance around *potential interference* in PAPI's data collection process. PAPI will benefit from VFF becoming a strong advocate for data integrity, given VFF's role in the data collection process. UNDP's leadership should engage national VFF leaders more directly on the importance of safeguarding the integrity of data collection on the ground from potential interference by officials at lower levels in the provinces. Also, UNDP and PAPI team should institute regular consultative meetings with provincial officials around the data integrity issue to build support and prevent interference.

- To better communicate PAPI research data and reports, the PAPI team should *simplify the language and formats* used in PAPI and thematic reports without compromising the analytical quality. This will make PAPI's insights and messages more accessible and comprehensible to general audiences and enhance impact.

- PAPI team should actively seek avenues to further *integrate PAPI's insights and evidence into existing national policy frameworks* and governmental planning/review processes. By bringing PAPI closer to internal oversight systems, its impact will be ingrained into the iterative process of policy formulation and review, moving beyond its current role as an external assessment.

- There is also an opportunity for PAPI to organize *regular policy dialogues* that include a diverse range of stakeholders such as academics, policymakers, and civil society organizations. These forums could be utilized to dissect complex policy issues, using PAPI's empirical evidence as a basis for targeted interventions.

- PAPI team should continue and expand the recent practice of *complementary research and advocacy* that goes beyond mere assessment to propose tailored community-level solutions for specific localities. The team should promote complementary research that identifies good practices from high performing provinces that can be replicated across Vietnam.

- PAPI team should explore options to engage more actively in creating avenues for the *empowerment of women*. This could include leadership training programmes, mentoring networks with existing female officials, and media campaigns specifically designed to build confidence and encourage political participation among women.

- PAPI team could also intensify *partnerships with civil society and other relevant stakeholders* to leverage PAPI data for targeted advocacy campaigns promoting gender equality, especially for LGBTIQ+ inclusion, in provinces. As PAPI works towards inclusive governance, the promotion of the *participation and inclusion of LGBTIQ+ in local governance* should be a priority to build on what has been done in 2023. Also, in preparation for 2026 Elections, the promotion of women in politics, including representatives of women with disabilities, should be continued as a focus in PAPI advocacy activities towards 2026.

- PAPI team should proactively share relevant PAPI data with government report writers for *human rights mechanisms* like the Universal Periodic Review, SDGs and the Voluntary National Review. PAPI team should continue to leverage *e-governance* research and initiatives to expand vulnerable groups' access to digital public services.

- PAPI team has an opportunity to *expand the provision of specialized training* and capacity building for provincial government departments, especially in key sectors such as health and education, to effectively interpret and utilize PAPI data for sectoral strategies, planning and budgeting. A focused effort should be made to incorporate PAPI findings and research into local authorities' annual planning and budgeting processes, thus facilitating more targeted governance reforms. The team explore collaborative capacity building with agencies like the Departments of Home Affairs.

- The PAPI team should *further partnerships with media and journalists* to produce in-depth reports that utilize PAPI's granular data to advocate for reforms in local-level governance. The PAPI team should *increase the turnover of regular PAPI-based content* (op-eds, policy briefs) for dissemination across print, broadcast and digital media to expand public awareness The PAPI team should *offer customized data analytics support to media outlets* to strengthen reporting on local governance issues.

- PAPI team should explore ways of *strengthening coordination and cooperation with other governance surveys* in Vietnam, without jeopardizing the independence and integrity of the initiative. There is an opportunity to *strengthen cooperation with PCI* through joint dissemination events and publications to maximize reach and provide multi-dimensional insights into governance. To this end, it will be useful to institute regular consultative meetings between PAPI and PCI teams to identify collaboration opportunities on operations and stakeholder engagement.

The following are recommendations directly relevant to the UNDP Country Office.

- UNDP should leverage PAPI's data and research more effectively as a *foundational tool for UNDP's projects* related to local-level governance. This implies not only integrating PAPI data and research into existing initiatives, but also developing new, targeted interventions around PAPI findings to address identified governance challenges and needs at the provincial level. For example, if PAPI data or research reveals inefficiencies in service delivery in healthcare, a new UNDP initiative could focus on improving healthcare in that specific locality. Furthermore, new projects could be designed with results frameworks that are intrinsically aligned with PAPI's outcome-oriented metrics.

- UNDP's Management should launch an intensified and carefully-designed *engagement process with high-ranking officials* of the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF), Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), and the National Assembly to foster stronger political backing for PAPI. In particular, UNDP should make efforts to engage national VFF leaders to gain full endorsement of PAPI's integrity, which will help safeguard independence, especially at the local level. Strategic dialogues with these institutions should delineate the merits of PAPI in contributing to good governance and to garner commitment for protecting its independence and integrity.

- UNDP should identify and *engage high-level champions* within VFF, MPI, MOHA, National Assembly and other Party/State agencies to secure stronger political backing. UNDP should proactively build a closer rapport with the VFF leadership for greater support for PAPI at higher levels. UNDP should continue to *engage the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics* to contribute academic insights and disseminate

PAPI through high-level official training. UNDP should explore an *expanded role for MPI* as a champion of PAPI to further institutionalize it in Vietnam's policy landscape.

- UNDP and PAPI team should institute *regular consultative meetings with provincial officials* around the data integrity issue to build support and prevent interference.

Lower-priority Recommendations (after June 2025)[28]

The following are recommendations directly relevant to the PAPI Team.

- PAPI team could consider *shifting to a bi-annual survey* as a way of saving costs and focusing more on policy research and advocacy. If this is considered, it should be done on the basis of a clear cost-benefit analysis to evaluate the trade-offs between the two options. This should include consultations with diverse stakeholders to gauge the perceived impact of a bi-annual survey on the momentum of the PAPI initiative.

- PAPI team could consider the *further increase survey sample size* to boost representation, especially with regards to minority areas and informal settlements. Trade-offs should be carefully considered as any expansion of the sample size requires additional financing.

- PAPI team should further its *collaboration with the Office of the Government's Agency for Public Administrative Control* to develop a dashboard system for real-time governance data. This feature will enable more agile and timely interventions by local governments regarding public administrative services and e-governance.

- The PAPI team should *organize hands-on mentoring and technical support for academic, media and civil society organizations* on integrating PAPI data and research into their advocacy activities and research. PAPI team could also facilitate study tours and inter-provincial exchanges for provincial officials to learn best practices from high performing provinces.

- PAPI team should *develop interdisciplinary academic partnerships* to broaden PAPI research into areas like environment, gender equity and social inclusion.

- PAPI team could further prioritize specialized research on *how women experience governance outcomes* across PAPI domains to uncover nuanced barriers.

The following are recommendations directly relevant to the UNDP Country Office.

- UNDP should continue to *explore partnerships* with current and additional donor governments, international organizations, and foundations to diversify funding for the initiative.

- UNDP should develop a *contingency (risk management) plan* for PAPI, which outlines explicit mitigation measures for the identified risks and identifies high-level allies. The plan should include rapid-response mechanisms for handling instances of data tampering or political interference, and guidelines for the invocation of high-level political support when needed.

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[28] This is the date the corresponds with the start of the new phase of the initiative.

ANNEX I: MTR'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

Background and context

As a low middle-income country, Viet Nam is facing new social, economic and institutional structural transformation. Policymakers need better data and evidence-based systems to make informed decisions; voice and agency of citizens and of the most vulnerable needs to be enabled; and transparency and access to information are fundamental to maintain public trust in its institutions and improve an open and fair business environment. Citizens, who are both beneficiaries of public policy and end-users of public services, increasingly demand that these public systems are effective, more transparent, and accountable, more responsive to tax-payers' expectations, more open to critical voices for reforms and improvements, and be able to catch up with societal changes. They also demand the public sector to promote development and equity public participation in decision-making processes, and citizens' roles in oversight and monitoring.

To assist Viet Nam in tracking those challenges and suggesting where the country should focus their energy and resources, since 2009, the research project "the Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI)" has been commissioned by UNDP in Viet Nam together with the Centre for Community Support and Development Studies (CECODES) and different agencies within the Viet Nam Fatherland Front agencies (with the latest VFF partner being the Centre for Research and Training of the Viet Nam Fatherland Front), and the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (which has played a critical role in disseminating PAPI findings to provincial leaders through action-based research and policy advice).

The PAPI project aims to generate information that can improve the performance of local governments in meeting their citizens' needs by: (i) enabling citizens to benchmark their local government's performance and advocate for improvement; and (ii) creating constructive competition and promoting learning among local authorities. It puts citizens at the heart of Viet Nam's development. As 'end users' of public administration and public services they are fully capable of assessing the performance of the State and local authorities and supporting the State in establishing a State that is "of the people, by the people and for the people. It aims to benefit citizens, central and local governments, elected bodies, mass organisations, the media, and the international community in Viet Nam and abroad.

The initiative was piloted in three provinces in 2009 and then expanded for larger pilot in 30 selected provinces in 2010. With the success of the pilots, PAPI was replicated for the first time and scaled up to all 63 provinces since 2011 in Viet Nam to be the first ever mass survey on citizens. Since then, the survey has been iterated every year. Box 1 in Appendix 2 introduces the PAPI Research and Advocacy Project in greater detail.

Over the first 14 years of its development, PAPI has contributed to improving local governance and promoting inclusive governance. The monitoring tool itself has inspired the continuation of this important project over the years. After funding from the Government of Spain (2009-2010) and the Government of Switzerland (2011-2017), the PAPI project has been further funded by the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) until 2025 and the Embassy of Ireland until possibly 2027. The project has now expanded to cover two additional components, i.e., Citizen Powered Innovation Initiative and Person with Disability Inclusive Governance with the major additional contribution from DFAT. For more information about the PAPI project and its budget, see Appendix 1.

PAPI has been the largest annual citizen-centric, nationwide policy monitoring tool. Over the past 14 years, PAPI has collected the views of 178,243 randomly selected citizens about the country's performance in governance and public administration in various sectors, based on their direct interactions with local governments. In 2022 alone, 16,117 respondents, including migrants, shared their reflections based on interactions with public authorities over the past year. In addition, to date, every province has hosted or convened a PAPI diagnostic workshop. All 63 provinces have issued action plans, directives, official letters and/or resolutions to request that local government agencies respond to citizen feedback obtained through PAPI

(see the list here). The PAPI reports and data have been used extensively by government agencies, development partners, civil society organizations, the media and researchers. The PAPI data has also promoted innovation from provinces of Tay Ninh and Ha Giang through the Citizen Powered Innovation Initiative. For brief information about PAPI's research, advocacy and technical support coverage, see Appendix 2.

Therefore, PAPI generates information about the actual performance of local authorities in meeting the expanding needs and expectations of citizens. By doing so, PAPI promotes self-reflection for improvement, creates constructive competition, and promotes learning among local authorities. In addition, PAPI acts as a rigorous and objective platform that allows citizens to benchmark their local government's performance and advocate for improvements in different aspects of governance and public administration; aspects that are evolving as Viet Nam further develops economically and socially. PAPI also contributes to expectations that the governments at all levels will be more open and responsive to the feedback and expectations of citizens.

This Terms of Reference is designed to recruit one senior international expert on montitoring and evaluation to conduct the second mid-term review (MTR) together with one national expert in the same field. Among other tasks mentioned below, the MTR will assess the project's alignment with the UNDP Viet Nam Country Programme Document 2022-2026, UNDP Strategic Plan 2022-2025, United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (CF) 2022-2026 in Viet Nam. The evaluation is also in line with Viet Nam Country Office's Evaluation Plan and UNDP's evaluation policy.

Basic project information can also be included in table format as follows. More details could be found in the Appendix 1 of this TOR.

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project/outcome title: The Vietnam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI)

Quantum ID: 00100002

Corporate outcome and output:

CPD Output 3.2 [primary]: Improved mechanisms for promoting transparency, public participation, integrity, adaptability and accountability, including participation of women and other vulnerable groups.

CPD Output 3.4 [secondary]: Capacities strengthened to undertake legal, policy and institutional reforms to address structural barriers to gender equality and inclusion of persons with disability.

Country: Viet Nam

Region: RBAP

Date project document signed: November 2017

Project Start Date: November 2017

Project Planned End Date: December 2025

Project budget: USD 12,103,509

Funding source (for 2023 funding): DFAT, Irish Aid

Implementing party[29]: UNDP

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[29] This is the entity that has overall responsibility for implementation of the project (award), effective use of resources and delivery of outputs in the signed project document and workplan.

1. **Evaluation objectives and scope of work**

2.1. Objectives

As required by <u>UNDP Evaluation Guidelines</u> and in agreement with the international donors for PAPI, the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Embassy of Ireland, a second mid-term review is being carried out in order to:

1. assess whether or not the research project is moving in the right direction towards its expected outcomes,
2. identify the key challenges in achieving the project outcomes; and,
3. provide recommendations to meet those challenges.

The MTR also will inform UNDP and the donors about the possibility of the extension of the project after June 2025 when the current project cycle ends.

2.2. Scope of work

The MTR will review PAPI research project during the period from 2020-2023 after the first mid-term review in 2019. The review will cover the project's contributions to the achievement of the expected project outputs and outcomes, using the four OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of **Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Sustainability**. In addition, the MTR will assess how the PAPI project addresses cross-cutting themes, including human rights, gender equality and disability issues.

The recommendations in the MTR report should be practical and action-oriented and guide the implementation of the PAPI project towards 2025. They should also project opportunities for the PAPI project to continue towards 2030 for it to contribute to tracking Viet Nam's development in the Sustainable Development Goal 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, among others.

2. **Evaluation criteria and key guiding questions**

The MTR should be rated in accordance with the following aspects:

<u>Relevance</u>: Evaluate the logics and unity of the process in planning and designing the activities.

<u>Efficiency</u>: Evaluate the efficiency of the project implementation, the quality of the results achieved and the time/political/other constraints.

<u>Effectiveness</u>: Conduct an assessment management decision vis-à-vis the cost effectiveness; and to which extend the project outputs are on track to be effectively achieved.

<u>Impact</u>: Evaluate any indications of the impact of the project, as well as its contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

<u>Sustainability and national ownership</u>: Assess the likelihood of results becoming sustainable with specific focus on national capacity and ownership over the process.

<u>Agenda 2030, Anti-corruption, Human rights, Gender equality, disability inclusion and social inclusion</u>: Assess relevant cross-cutting issues addressed through the intervention, i.e., gender equality, human rights, vulnerable/ marginalized groups, leaving no one behind.

A preliminary list of guiding questions is listed below, which should be further refined by the consultant and agreed with UNDP.

Relevance/Coherence

- To what extent was the project in line with national development priorities, country programme outputs and outcomes, the UNDP Strategic Plan, and the SDGs?
- To what extent does the project contribute to the theory of change for the relevant country programme outcome?
- To what extent does the project contribute to gender equality, the empowerment of women and the human rights-based approach?
- To what extent has the project been appropriately responsive to political, legal, economic, institutional, etc., changes in the country?

- To what extent are the objectives of the project design (inputs, activities, outputs and their indicators) and its theory of change logical and coherent?
- To what extent was the method of delivery appropriate to the context?
- To what extent the project was able to address the needs identified by stakeholders?
- To what extent the intervention remained relevant during COVID-19 and/or ability of project to adapt?

Effectiveness

- To what extent did the project contribute to the country programme outcomes and outputs, the SDGs, the UNDP Strategic Plan, and national development priorities?
- To what extent were the project outputs achieved, considering men, women, and vulnerable groups?
- What factors have contributed to achieving, or not, intended country programme outputs and outcomes?
- What factors contributed to effectiveness or ineffectiveness?
- In which areas does the project have the greatest achievements? Why and what have been the supporting factors? How can the project build on or expand these achievements?
- In which areas does the project have the fewest achievements? What have been the constraining factors and why? How can or could they be overcome?
- What, if any, alternative strategies would have been more effective in achieving the project objectives?
- Are the project objectives and outputs clear, practical and feasible within its frame? Do they clearly address women, men and vulnerable groups?
- To what extent have different stakeholders been involved in project implementation?
- To what extent are project management and implementation participatory, and is this participation of men, women and vulnerable groups contributing towards achievement of the project objectives?
- To what extent has the project contributed to gender equality, the empowerment of women and the realization of human rights?

Efficiency

- To what extent was the project management structure as outlined in the project document efficient in generating the expected results?
- To what extent have the UNDP project implementation strategy and execution been efficient and cost-effective?
- To what extent has there been an economical use of financial and human resources? Have resources (funds, male and female staff, time, expertise, etc.) been allocated strategically to achieve outcomes?
- To what extent have resources been used efficiently? Have activities supporting the strategy been cost-effective?
- To what extent have project funds and activities been delivered in a timely manner?
- To what extent do the M&E systems utilized by UNDP ensure effective and efficient project management

Sustainability

- Are there any financial risks that may jeopardize the sustainability of project outputs affecting women, men and vulnerable groups?
- To what extent will financial and economic resources be available to sustain the benefits achieved by the project?
- Are there any social or political risks that may jeopardize sustainability of project outputs and the project contributions to country programme outputs and outcomes?
- Do the legal frameworks, policies and governance structures and processes within which the project operates pose risks that may jeopardize sustainability of project benefits?
- To what extent did UNDP actions pose an environmental threat to the sustainability of project outputs, possibly affecting project beneficiaries (men and women) in a negative way? What is the chance that the level of stakeholder ownership will be sufficient to allow for the project benefits to be sustained?

- To what extent are lessons learned documented by the project team on a continual basis and shared with appropriate parties who could learn from the project?
- To what extent do UNDP interventions have well-designed and well-planned exit strategies which include a gender dimension?
- What could be potential new areas of work and innovative measures for sustaining the results?
- To what extent are policy and regulatory frameworks in place that will support the continuation of similar interventions in the future?
- To what extent do partnerships exist with other national institutions, NGOs, United Nations agencies, the private sector and other development partners to sustain the attained results?

Agenda 2030, Human rights, Gender equality, disability inclusion and social inclusion
- To what extent has the project been able to help to support the Leave No-One Behind agenda and populations considered vulnerable (those below the poverty line, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, female-headed households, and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups)?
- To what extent has the project promoted positive changes for women, persons with disabilities and marginalized group? Were there any unintended effects?
- Were persons with disabilities consulted and meaningfully involved in programme planning and implementation?
- Were persons with disabilities consulted and meaningfully involved in programme planning and implementation?
- What proportion of the beneficiaries of a programme were persons with disabilities?

3. **Methodology**

This MTR will adhere to the United Nations Evaluation Group's Norms & Standards, UNDP Evaluation Guidelines and UNDP Evaluation Policy. Please refer to the following links:
- http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914
- http://web.undp.org/evaluation/guidance.shtml#handbook
- http://web.undp.org/evaluation/policy.shtml

It is proposed that the MTR will be a participatory exercise considering the views and suggestions of a wide range of stakeholders within and outside the context of the project. Stakeholders' ownership of the findings, recommendations and follow up actions is seen as one of the key factors for ensuring commitment to project implementation in the later stage. Gender and human rights lens should be applied thoroughly during all stages of evaluation to duly address gender, disability, and human right issues.

The MTR should employ a combination of qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods and instruments. The evaluators are expected to follow a participatory and consultative approach that ensures close engagement with the evaluation managers, implementing partners and male and female direct beneficiaries. As part of the Inception report (1st deliverable), the evaluators should propose a work plan with detailed evaluation methodology. Suggested methodological tools and approaches include:

- Collect relevant documents
- Conduct a desk review of collected documents
- Conduct in depth interviews (face-to-face or virtually) with key counterparts at central level and local level to understand the reasons for identified gaps in relevance and efficiency as well as to document initial impact and lessons learnt of the project
- Carry out surveys and use questionnaires
- Prepare a draft report to seek comments from different stakeholders
- Present the key findings and recommendations to UNDP Senior Management and stakeholders
- Finalize and submit of the MTR report

4. Evaluation products (deliverables)

Expected deliverables of the MTR evaluation team include:

1. **MTR inception report (10-12 pages):** The inception report should be carried out following and based on preliminary discussions with UNDP after the desk review and should be produced before the evaluation starts (before any formal evaluation interviews, survey distribution or field visits) and prior to the country visit in the case of international evaluators. The team of evaluation consultants will then finalize the evaluation methodology and agree with UNDP before starting the evaluation process.
2. **MTR debriefing**: Key findings and recommendations presented to the key stakeholders (half-day seminar at the UN House, 304 Kim Ma, Ha Noi)
3. **Draft MTR report:** The draft Report should be in both English and Vietnamese, with 60 pages (maximum) per English/Vietnamese version and include 2-3 pages of Executive Summary). The draft MTR report should be concise, self-explanatory, evidence-based, and the recommendations therein should be clear, constructive and forward-looking.
4. **Audit Trail:** Addressing all comments from key stakeholders on the draft report.
5. **Final MTR Report:** should be in both English and Vietnamese, with 60 pages (maximum) per English/Vietnamese version and include 2-3 pages of Executive Summary. The final MTR report should be concise, self-explanatory and evidence-based, and the recommendations therein should be clear, constructive and forward-looking.

5. Evaluation team composition and required competencies

The MTR will be conducted by an independent consultant team consisting of one international consultant (team leader) and one national consultant.

6.1. International consultant (team leader)

The main responsibilities of the international consultant (team leader) are:

- Be responsible for overall implementation of the MTR.
- Develop an evidence-based review methodology. Fine-tune key review questions
- Allocate tasks to the national consultant (team member). Supervise and guide the national consultant in implementation of specific tasks
- Analyze collected data and information
- Write and finalize the evaluation report (incl. Audit Trail)
- Present report findings at a stakeholder consultation meeting online/in person, and the final presentation workshop in person.

6.2. National consultant

The main responsibilities of the national consultant are:

- Fulfil tasks defined by and work under the supervision of the team leader
- Help the team leader in understanding the Vietnamese situation and context
- Interpret for the team leader in discussion with the Vietnamese partners
- Translate the evaluation report from English into Vietnamese

During the evaluation process the consultant team will work independently and self-sufficiently in organization, logistics and arrangements of meetings with stakeholders and counterparts.

6. Tentative time frame for the evaluation process

The MTR will take place from **20 July to 30 October 2023** with **a total number of person-days of 25 for each consultant**. It is suggested the evaluation is conducted for three weeks of consecutive work as per the below tentative schedule.

ACTIVITY	ESTIMATED # OF DAYS	EXPECTED OUTPUTS	RESPONSIBLE
Desk Review	3 person-days (max)	• Notes with concrete elaborated questions and interview schedules. • Initial briefing with UNDP	Evaluation Team
Interviews with relevant stakeholders	10 person-days	• Suggested and expanded sample of informants. • Informants met for data and information inputs for the review	Evaluation Team
Report writing	5 person-days	• Briefing of the MTR initial findings and recommendations to the key stakeholders (a half-day seminar)	Evaluation Team
Finalizing the mid-term review report	7 person-days	• Final report in English and Vietnamese (max. 25 pages, excluding annexes) including executive summary (max 2 pages) with critical and analytical views and clear recommendations	Evaluation Team

Estimated total days for the evaluation: 25 person-days

UNDP will provide the independent consultants team with an initial list of stakeholders to meet. It will be the responsibility of the independent consultant to arrange meetings.

7. **Duty Station & Expected Places of Travel**
   • Duty station: Ha Noi, Viet Nam

   • Expected places of travels for the MTR team in Viet Nam: One (01) province in the North and one (01) province in the South with 04 days to be spent in each province including travel days. The provinces will be selected with the MTR team during the MTR inception phase.
     • For the International Consultant, in particular, two (02) two-day missions to Ha Noi are expected, with one to present the inception report, and the other to present the final MTR findings, together with the Hanoi-based National Consultant.

ANNEX II: PROJECT'S RESULTS FRAMEWORK

Sustainable Development Goals: The PAPI Project supports Viet Nam in gauging the country's progress in implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In particular, PAPI provides data and information to measure the following SDG 16 indicators:

Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

- 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

- 16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms

- 16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

- 16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

2017-2020 One UN Strategic Plan Outcome 4.1: The PAPI Project supports Output 4.1 "Participatory decision-making and responsive institutions" under the Focus Area 4 'Promoting Justice, Peace and Inclusive Governance' - By 2021, participatory and transparent decision-making processes and accountable institutions are strengthened, with policies and implementation mechanisms that are responsive to all people, particularly vulnerable groups, women, youth and children.

Project title and Atlas Project Number: PAPI   Award ID 00095984   Project ID 00100002

TARGETS (by frequency of data collection)

OUTPUT INDICATORS[1]	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE Value	Year	2017 Nov	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 June	TOTAL	DATA COLLECTION METHODS & RISKS
- Standardised robust and objective methodology set forth for PAPI further refined and followed upon for PAPI by end of May	Minutes on refined methodology	1	Every year	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	blank cell	blank cell	7	Annual PAPI Reports
- Fieldwork for PAPI completed in all 63 provinces by December	PAPI Dataset	1	Every year	blank cell	1	1	1	1	1	blank cell	blank cell	blank cell	5	Annual PAPI Datasets
- Dataset for PAPI finalised for analysis by mid December	Verified PAPI Dataset	1	Every year	blank cell	1	1	1	1	1	blank cell	blank cell	blank cell	5	Cleaned PAPI datasets for analysis
- Initial analysis of PAPI data carried out in the second half of December for further writing up of PAPI report in following year January and February	PAPI Data	1	Every year	blank cell	1	1	1	1	1	blank cell	blank cell	blank cell	5	Presentations at National Advisory Board Meetings
- PAPI data analysed by PAPI research team members by February	PAPI Data and other references	1	Every year	blank cell	1	1	1	1	1	blank cell	blank cell	blank cell	5	Drafting Reports
- Final PAPI Report completed, validated with the National Advisory Board	PAPI Data and other references	1	Every year	1	1	1	1	1	1	blank cell	blank cell	blank cell	6	Finalising Reports
- National launching event to disseminate latest PAPI findings by March/April	PAPI Data and Reports	1	Every year	1	1	1	1	1	1	blank cell	blank cell	blank cell	6	Launching Events

OUTPUT INDICATORS[1]	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE Value	Year	2017 Nov	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 June	TOTAL	DATA COLLECTION METHODS & RISKS
- Regional/ provincial dissemination workshops to disseminate PAPI findings convened for further policy dialogues with provinces after PAPI findings are launched each year	PAPI Data and Reports	10	Every year	blank cell	10	10	10	5	15	22	blank cell	blank cell	72	Diagnostic Events
- PAPI findings and data used at the central level for policy monitoring purposes (e.g. in M&E of corruption and anti-corruption work; in PAR Index by the Government) throughout the year	Media coverage and Government reports	1	Every year	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	blank cell	blank cell	7	Media clipping and government report screening posted on www.papi.org.vn
- A series of case studies on good and poor performers for peer learning throughout the year using time-series data	Case study reports	28	Every year	3	3	3	3	3	3	8	blank cell	blank cell	26	Case study reports available at www.papi.org.vn/eng
-www.papi.org.vn website updated and maintained regularly throughout PAPI iterations	The website	1	Every year	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	blank cell	blank cell	7	www.papi.org.vn

ANNEX III: MTR CRITERIA AND KEY QUESTIONS

Relevance

- To what extent was the project in line with national development priorities, country programme outputs and outcomes, the UNDP Strategic Plan, and the SDGs?
- To what extent does the project contribute to the theory of change for the relevant country programme outcome?
- To what extent does the project contribute to gender equality, the empowerment of women and the human rights-based approach?
- To what extent has the project been appropriately responsive to political, legal, economic, institutional, etc., changes in the country?
- To what extent are the objectives of the project design (inputs, activities, outputs and their indicators) and its theory of change logical and coherent?
- To what extent was the method of delivery appropriate to the context?
- To what extent the project was able to address the needs identified by stakeholders?
- To what extent the intervention remained relevant during COVID-19 and/or ability of project to adapt?

Effectiveness

- To what extent did the project contribute to the country programme outcomes and outputs, the SDGs, the UNDP Strategic Plan, and national development priorities?
- To what extent were the project outputs achieved, considering men, women, and vulnerable groups?
- What factors have contributed to achieving, or not, intended country programme outputs and outcomes?
- What factors contributed to effectiveness or ineffectiveness?
- In which areas does the project have the greatest achievements? Why and what have been the supporting factors? How can the project build on or expand these achievements?
- In which areas does the project have the fewest achievements? What have been the constraining factors and why? How can or could they be overcome?
- What, if any, alternative strategies would have been more effective in achieving the project objectives?
- Are the project objectives and outputs clear, practical and feasible within its frame? Do they clearly address women, men and vulnerable groups?
- To what extent have different stakeholders been involved in project implementation?
- To what extent are project management and implementation participatory, and is this participation of men, women and vulnerable groups contributing towards achievement of the project objectives?
- To what extent has the project contributed to gender equality, the empowerment of women and the realization of human rights?

Efficiency

- To what extent was the project management structure as outlined in the project document efficient in generating the expected results?
- To what extent have the UNDP project implementation strategy and execution been efficient and cost-effective?
- To what extent has there been an economical use of financial and human resources? Have resources (funds, male and female staff, time, expertise, etc.) been allocated strategically to achieve outcomes?
- To what extent have resources been used efficiently? Have activities supporting the strategy been cost-effective?
- To what extent have project funds and activities been delivered in a timely manner?
- To what extent do the M&E systems utilized by UNDP ensure effective and efficient project management?

ANNEX IV: MTR MATRIX

Review Criteria	Key Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators/Success Standard	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods/Tools
Relevance	To what extent was the project in line with national development priorities, UNDP Strategic Plan, and SDGs?	- Alignment with country's development priorities? - Alignment with UNDP and SDGs?	- Degree of alignment - Evidence of contribution	- National development plans - UNDP Strategic Plan - SDGs framework	- Documentary Review - Interviews
Relevance	To what extent does the project contribute to the theory of change for the relevant country programme outcome?	- Promotion of change within country's needs? - Evidence of influence on outcomes?	- Alignment with country's theory of change - Influence on specific outcomes	- Country program documents - Monitoring and evaluation reports	- Documentary Review - Interviews with project experts
Relevance	To what extent does the project contribute to gender equality, empowerment of women, and human rights?	- Integration of gender equality and empowerment? - Focus on human rights?	- Progress towards gender equality - Integration of human rights	- Gender analysis reports - Project implementation reports	- Focus Group Discussions - Interviews with gender experts - Documentary Review
Relevance	To what extent has the project been appropriately responsive to political, legal, economic, institutional changes?	- Mechanisms to monitor and respond to changes? - Adaptation to ensure relevance?	- Responsiveness and adaptability - Alignment with evolving priorities	- Monitoring reports - Government regulations and policies	- Online Survey - Interviews with project management and local authorities - Documentary Review
Relevance	To what extent are the objectives of the project design (inputs, activities, outputs, and indicators) and its	- Are the project's inputs, activities, and outputs clearly defined and logically linked? - Is the theory of	- Clarity and logic in design and theory of change - Alignment with project goals	- Project design documents - Theory of change documentation	- Documentary Review - Interviews with project designers

Review Criteria	Key Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators/Success Standard	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods/Tools
	theory of change logical and coherent?	change coherent and applicable to the context?			
Relevance	To what extent was the method of delivery appropriate to the context?	- Was the delivery method tailored to the local context? - How effective was the chosen method in achieving project goals?	- Appropriateness of delivery method - Evidence of effectiveness in context	- Project implementation reports - Feedback from beneficiaries and stakeholders	- Interviews with implementation staff - Focus Group Discussions with beneficiaries
Relevance	To what extent was the project able to address the needs identified by stakeholders?	- How were stakeholders' needs identified and addressed? - Was the project responsive to emerging needs during implementation?	- Alignment with stakeholders' identified needs - Responsiveness to emerging needs	- Stakeholders' needs assessment reports - Monitoring and evaluation reports	- Interviews with stakeholders - Online Survey with Project Beneficiaries
Relevance	To what extent did the intervention remain relevant during COVID-19 and/or the ability of the project to adapt?	- How did the project adapt to challenges posed by COVID-19? - Did the project maintain relevance despite changing circumstances?	- Demonstrated adaptability to COVID-19 challenges - Continued relevance in evolving context	- COVID-19 adaptation plans - Monitoring reports during COVID-19 period	- Documentary Review - Focus Group Discussions with beneficiaries - Interviews with project management
Effectiveness	To what extent did the project contribute to the country programme outcomes and outputs, the SDGs, the UNDP Strategic Plan, and national development priorities?	- How aligned are the project's contributions with country program outcomes? - How does the project align with SDGs, UNDP Strategic Plan, and national development?	- Degree of contribution to country program, SDGs, UNDP Strategic Plan - Alignment with national development	- Project reports - Country program documentation - SDGs framework - National development plans	- Documentary Review - Interviews with project stakeholders

Review Criteria	Key Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators/Success Standard	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods/Tools
Effectiveness	To what extent were the project outputs achieved, considering men, women, and vulnerable groups?	- What were the specific outputs for different demographic groups? - How successful was the project in reaching these outputs?	- Achievement of specific outputs for men, women, vulnerable groups - Inclusiveness in results	- Project output reports - Gender and vulnerability assessments	- Focus Group Discussions with beneficiaries - Interviews with project implementers
Effectiveness	What factors have contributed to achieving, or not, intended country programme outputs and outcomes?	- What factors positively influenced the achievement of outputs? - What factors hindered the achievement of intended outcomes?	- Identification of facilitating and hindering factors - Analysis of their impact	- Project evaluation reports - Stakeholder interviews	- Interviews with project management and stakeholders - Documentary Review
Effectiveness	What factors contributed to effectiveness or ineffectiveness?	- What internal/external factors enhanced project effectiveness? - What internal/external factors led to ineffectiveness?	- Identification of factors contributing to effectiveness/ineffectiveness - Analysis of their influence	- Project evaluation reports - Feedback from beneficiaries and implementers	- Online Survey with Project Beneficiaries - Interviews with project management
Effectiveness	In which areas does the project have the greatest achievements? Why and what have been the supporting factors? How can the project build on or expand these achievements?	- What are the areas of greatest success? - What factors supported these successes? - How can these successes be expanded or built upon?	- Identification of areas of success - Analysis of supporting factors - Recommendations for expansion	- Project success stories - Monitoring and evaluation reports	- Focus Group Discussions with beneficiaries - Interviews with project implementers - Documentary Review
Effectiveness	In which areas does the project have the fewest achievements? What have been the constraining factors and why? How can or could they be overcome?	- What are the areas of least success? - What factors constrained these areas? - How can these constraints be overcome?	- Identification of areas of fewest achievements - Analysis of constraining factors - Recommendations for overcoming constraints	- Project monitoring reports - Stakeholder feedback	- Interviews with project management - Online Survey with Project Beneficiaries - Focus Group Discussions
Effectiveness	What, if any, alternative strategies would have been more effective in achieving the project objectives?	- What were the initial strategies employed? - What alternative strategies could	- Identification of initial strategies - Analysis of potential alternatives -	- Project strategy documents - Interviews with	- Documentary Review - Interviews

Review Criteria	Key Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators/Success Standard	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods/Tools
		have been used? - How might they have been more effective?	Comparative assessment of effectiveness	project management and experts	with project stakeholders
Effectiveness	Are the project objectives and outputs clear, practical, and feasible within its frame? Do they clearly address women, men, and vulnerable groups?	- How clear, practical, and feasible are the objectives and outputs? - To what extent do they address different demographic groups?	- Clarity, practicality, and feasibility of objectives and outputs - Inclusivity in design targeting women, men, vulnerable groups	- Project design documents - Gender and vulnerability assessments	- Documentary Review - Focus Group Discussions with beneficiaries
Effectiveness	To what extent have different stakeholders been involved in project implementation?	- Who were the key stakeholders involved? - What was the level and nature of their involvement?	- Identification of key stakeholders - Analysis of their involvement and contribution	- Stakeholder engagement reports - Interviews with stakeholders	- Interviews with stakeholders - Focus Group Discussions with beneficiaries and stakeholders
Effectiveness	To what extent are project management and implementation participatory, and is this participation of men, women, and vulnerable groups contributing towards achievement of the project objectives?	- How participatory is the project management and implementation process? - How has the participation of different groups contributed to project success?	- Degree of participatory management and implementation - Analysis of contribution from participation of men, women, vulnerable groups	- Project management documentation - Monitoring and evaluation reports - Gender analysis reports	- Focus Group Discussions with project implementers and beneficiaries - Online Survey with Project Beneficiaries - Interviews with project management
Effectiveness	To what extent has the project contributed to gender equality, the empowerment of women, and the realization of human rights?	- How has the project addressed gender equality and empowerment? - What impacts has it had on the realization of human rights?	- Contributions to gender equality and empowerment - Impacts on the realization of human rights	- Gender equality and empowerment assessments - Human rights impact reports	- Documentary Review - Interviews with gender and human rights experts - Focus Group Discussions with beneficiaries

Review Criteria	Key Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators/Success Standard	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods/Tools
Efficiency	To what extent was the project management structure as outlined in the project document efficient in generating the expected results?	- How was the project management structure designed? - How did it contribute to achieving expected results?	- Coherence of the management structure with project objectives - Effectiveness in achieving results	- Project management documents - Project results report	- Documentary Review - Interviews with project management
Efficiency	To what extent have the UNDP project implementation strategy and execution been efficient and cost-effective?	- What was the implementation strategy? - How efficient and cost-effective was the execution?	- Analysis of strategy alignment with efficiency principles - Cost-effectiveness analysis	- Project strategy documents - Financial reports	- Documentary Review - Interviews with UNDP officials
Efficiency	To what extent has there been an economical use of financial and human resources? Have resources (funds, male and female staff, time, expertise, etc.) been allocated strategically to achieve outcomes?	- How were financial and human resources allocated? - How did the allocation contribute to achieving outcomes?	- Resource allocation analysis - Evaluation of strategic alignment of resources with outcomes	- Financial reports - Human resource documentation - Project strategy documents	- Documentary Review - Focus Group Discussions with project staff
Efficiency	To what extent have resources been used efficiently? Have activities supporting the strategy been cost-effective?	- How were resources utilized? - Were the activities supporting the strategy cost-effective?	- Efficiency of resource utilization - Cost-effectiveness analysis of activities	- Financial reports - Activity reports	- Documentary Review - Online Survey with Project Beneficiaries
Efficiency	To what extent have project funds and activities been delivered in a timely manner?	- What was the timeline for funds and activities delivery? - How was the timeline adhered to?	- Timeline analysis - Evaluation of timeliness in fund disbursement and activity execution	- Financial reports - Project timeline documentation	- Documentary Review - Interviews with project implementers
Efficiency	To what extent do the M&E systems utilized by UNDP ensure effective and efficient project management?	- What M&E systems were utilized?	- Identification and analysis of M&E systems	- Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) reports	- Documentary Review

Review Criteria	Key Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators/Success Standard	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods/Tools
		- How have they ensured effective and efficient project management?	- Assessment of effectiveness and efficiency in project management	- Interviews with UNDP officials involved in M&E	- Interviews with UNDP M&E staff
Sustainability	Are there any financial risks that may jeopardize the sustainability of project outputs affecting women, men and vulnerable groups?	- What are the financial risks identified? - How might they impact sustainability for different groups?	- Identification and analysis of financial risks - Assessment of potential impact on sustainability	- Financial reports - Risk assessment documents - Stakeholder analysis	- Documentary Review - Interviews with financial analysts
Sustainability	To what extent will financial and economic resources be available to sustain the benefits achieved by the project?	- What financial and economic resources are needed? - How will they be secured for sustainability?	- Analysis of financial and economic resource needs - Evaluation of sustainability plans	- Project sustainability plans - Financial forecasts and analysis	- Documentary Review - Focus Group Discussions with financial planners
Sustainability	Are there any social or political risks that may jeopardize sustainability of project outputs and the project contributions to country programme outputs and outcomes?	- What social or political risks have been identified? - How might they impact sustainability of outputs and contributions?	- Identification and analysis of social and political risks - Assessment of potential impact on sustainability	- Political and social risk analysis - Stakeholder consultations and feedback	- Documentary Review - Interviews with social and political analysts
Sustainability	Do the legal frameworks, policies and governance structures and processes within which the project operates pose risks that may jeopardize sustainability of project benefits?	- How do the legal frameworks and policies relate to the project? - What governance structures and processes may pose risks to sustainability?	- Analysis of legal frameworks, policies, and governance structures - Evaluation of risks to sustainability	- Legal documents and policies - Governance structure analysis - Interviews with legal and governance experts	- Documentary Review - Interviews with legal and governance experts
Sustainability	To what extent did UNDP actions pose an environmental threat to the sustainability of project outputs, possibly affecting project	- How might UNDP actions have posed an environmental threat?	- Assessment of environmental impact of UNDP actions	- Environmental impact studies	- Documentary Review

Review Criteria	Key Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators/Success Standard	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods/Tools
	beneficiaries (men and women) in a negative way? What is the chance that the level of stakeholder ownership will be sufficient to allow for the project benefits to be sustained?	- How have beneficiaries been affected? - What is the level of stakeholder ownership for sustainability?	- Analysis of stakeholder ownership and potential for sustainability	- Beneficiary assessments - Stakeholder ownership analysis	- Online Survey with Project Beneficiaries - Focus Group Discussions with stakeholders
Sustainability	To what extent are lessons learned documented by the project team on a continual basis and shared with appropriate parties who could learn from the project?	- How are lessons learned documented? - Who are the appropriate parties? - How are lessons shared?	- Documentation process and frequency - Identification of appropriate parties - Sharing mechanisms and evidence of sharing	- Project documentation - Communication records with appropriate parties - Meeting minutes	- Documentary Review - Interviews with project team
Sustainability	To what extent do UNDP interventions have well-designed and well-planned exit strategies which include a gender dimension?	- What are the key components of the exit strategies? - How is the gender dimension included in the strategies? - How are these strategies implemented?	- Evaluation of exit strategy design and planning - Analysis of gender dimension inclusion - Implementation assessment	- Exit strategy documents - Gender analysis reports - Implementation reports	- Documentary Review - Focus Group Discussions with strategy designers
Sustainability	What could be potential new areas of work and innovative measures for sustaining the results?	- What are the existing areas of work? - What new areas could be explored? - What innovative measures are considered for sustainability?	- Analysis of existing and potential new areas of work - Evaluation of innovative measures for sustainability	- Strategic planning documents - Innovation proposals and plans - Stakeholder consultations	- Documentary Review - Interviews with innovation and planning teams
Sustainability	To what extent are policy and regulatory frameworks in place that	- What policies and regulations are relevant?	- Analysis of relevant policy and regulatory frameworks	- Policy and regulatory documents	- Documentary Review

Review Criteria	Key Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators/Success Standard	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods/Tools
	will support the continuation of similar interventions in the future?	- How do they support similar interventions? - What gaps or challenges exist?	- Evaluation of support for similar interventions - Identification of gaps and challenges	- Analysis reports of relevant frameworks - Government and organizational communications	- Online Survey with Project Beneficiaries
Sustainability	To what extent do partnerships exist with other national institutions, NGOs, United Nations agencies, the private sector and other development partners to sustain the attained results?	- Who are the existing partners? - What roles do they play in sustaining results? - What opportunities exist for new partnerships?	- Analysis of existing partnerships - Evaluation of roles and contributions - Identification of new partnership opportunities	- Partnership agreements and MOUs - Reports on partnership activities - Interviews with partners and stakeholders	- Documentary Review - Focus Group Discussions with partners and stakeholders
Impact	What are the main indications of the impact of the project?	- What specific outcomes can be identified as indicators of impact? - How are these outcomes measured and assessed? - What evidence exists to validate these indications?	- Identification and definition of specific outcomes as impact indicators - Methodology for measurement and assessment - Validation evidence of impact	- Project outcome reports - Impact assessment studies - Beneficiary feedback	- Interviews with project managers and beneficiaries - Focus Group Discussions - Documentary Review
Impact	What changes can be attributed to the contributions of the project and what factors have facilitated or impeded those changes?	- What specific changes are attributed to the project? - How are these changes measured and verified? - What factors have facilitated these changes?	- Specific changes identified and attributed to the project - Methodology for measuring and verifying changes	- Project evaluation reports - Interviews with stakeholders involved in the changes	- Interviews with project managers, beneficiaries, and stakeholders - Focus Group Discussions

Review Criteria	Key Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators/Success Standard	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods/Tools
		- What factors have impeded these changes?	- Factors facilitating and impeding changes identified and analyzed	- Documentation of facilitating and impeding factors	- Documentary Review - Online Survey with Project Beneficiaries
Impact	What is the project's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?	- Which SDGs are targeted by the project? - How does the project contribute to these SDGs? - What specific outcomes and outputs align with the SDGs? - How are these contributions measured and validated?	- Identification of targeted SDGs - Alignment of project outcomes and outputs with SDGs - Measurement and validation of contributions to SDGs	- Project documents outlining SDG alignment - Reports on SDG-related outcomes and outputs - UNDP or government documents related to SDG alignment	- Documentary Review - Focus Group Discussions with project team and stakeholders - Online Survey with Project Beneficiaries
Cross-cutting Issues	To what extent has the project been able to help support the Leave No-One Behind agenda and populations considered vulnerable (those below the poverty line, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, female-headed households, and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups)?	- How were vulnerable populations identified and targeted? - What specific support was provided? - What outcomes have been achieved with these populations?	- Identification and targeting of vulnerable populations - Description of support provided - Measurable outcomes with these groups	- Project planning documents - Reports on vulnerable population engagement - Feedback from target communities - Government and NGO reports on the Leave No-One Behind agenda	- Interviews with project staff and beneficiaries - Focus Group Discussions with targeted communities - Online Survey with Project Beneficiaries - Documentary Review
Cross-cutting Issues	To what extent has the project promoted positive changes for women, persons with disabilities,	- What were the specific interventions for these groups?	- Specific interventions targeting women, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups	- Project intervention descriptions	- Interviews with targeted beneficiaries and project staff

Review Criteria	Key Questions	Sub-Questions	Indicators/Success Standard	Data Sources	Data Collection Methods/Tools
	and marginalized groups? Were there any unintended effects?	- What positive changes have been observed? - What unintended effects have been identified, and how have they been managed?	- Measured positive changes - Identified and managed unintended effects	- Impact assessment studies focusing on targeted groups - Feedback from women, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups	- Focus Group Discussions - Online Survey with Project Beneficiaries - Documentary Review
Cross-cutting Issues	Were persons with disabilities consulted and meaningfully involved in the project planning and implementation?	- How were persons with disabilities identified and consulted? - What mechanisms were used to ensure meaningful involvement? - How was their feedback incorporated into planning and implementation?	- Identification and consultation process with persons with disabilities - Mechanisms for meaningful involvement - Evidence of incorporation of feedback	- Consultation records and transcripts - Project planning documents reflecting input from persons with disabilities - Feedback forms and survey results from persons with disabilities	- Interviews with project staff and persons with disabilities - Focus Group Discussions with persons with disabilities - Documentary Review
Cross-cutting Issues	What proportion of the beneficiaries of the project were persons with disabilities?	- How were beneficiaries identified, including persons with disabilities? - What proportion of the total beneficiaries were persons with disabilities? - What specific benefits were received by persons with disabilities?	- Identification process for beneficiaries including persons with disabilities - Proportion of persons with disabilities among total beneficiaries - Specific benefits received by persons with disabilities	- Beneficiary identification records - Project outcome reports detailing benefits to persons with disabilities - Surveys and feedback from persons with disabilities	- Interviews with project staff and beneficiaries - Focus Group Discussions with persons with disabilities - Online Survey with Project Beneficiaries - Documentary Review

ANNEX V: INTERVIEWED STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholder	Detailed Description	Method of Engagement
National-Level Agencies	1. National Innovation Centre, Ministry of Planning and Investment 2. Department of Social Affairs, Office of the National Assembly 3. Committee of Social Affairs of the National Assembly 4. Committee of People's Petitions of the National Assembly 5. Department for Public Administration Reforms, MOHA 6. Department for Anti-corruption, Government Inspectorate 7. Central Theoretical Council of the Central Committee 8. Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (HCMA) 9. Ministry of Justice (MoJ) 10. Center for Research and Training (Viet Nam Fatherland Front - VFF) 11. Agency for Public Administrative Control (APCA) 12. General Statistics Office (SDG-related department(s))	Interviews
Provincial-Level Agencies	• Department of Home Affairs, Department of Information and Communication, Provincial Vietnam Fatherland Front, Provincial People's Committee, Provincial People's Council in o Ha Noi o Ha Giang o Đồng Tháp//**Cần Thơ**//An Giang • Center for Public Administrative Services of Hà Giang Province	Interviews
Think Tanks and Civil Society Organizations	• People Participation Working Group (PPWG) with ECUE as the secretariat. • Center for Education Promotion and Empowerment of Women (CEPEW) • Center for Community Support Development Studies (CECODES) • Institute for Policy Studies and Media Development • Development and Policies Research Center (DEPOCEN) • Viet Nam Center for Economic and Strategic Studies (VESS) • Vietnam Federation on Disability (VFD) • Mekong Development Research Institute (MDRI) • Oxfam Viet Nam • Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI)	Interviews

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Stakeholder	Detailed Description	Method of Engagement
	• Institute for Society, Economics and Environment (ISEE)	
Academic Institutions	• Department of Constitutional and Administrative Laws, School of Law, Vietnam National University, Hanoi • National Economic University (NEU), Institute for Sustainable Development • Fulbright University's Master Programme on Public Policy	Interviews
Donors and International Organizations	• Australian Embassy • Embassy of Ireland • Canada • USAID • EU • Sweden • Norway • Netherlands • Switzerland • GIZ • KOICA • JICA	Interviews
	• UN Women • UN RCO • UNICEF • UNODC • WB	

UNDP	• PAPI Advisory Board Members
	• PAPI Project Team
	• PAPI Project Experts
	    o Duke University (intl expert)
	    o Arizona State University (intl expert)
	• Real-Time Analytics
		Online Survey with Advisory Board Members and Interviews with Project Team and Experts

	• UNDP CO Senior Management	Interviews
Media	• Mr. Hoàng Tư Giang Tuần VNN • Nguyễn Thu Hằng VN Express • Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Dũng Truyền hình Quốc hội	Interviews

ANNEX VI: PAPI SNAPSHOT (2009-2022)

The Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index

Aims: PAPI aims to generate information that can improve the performance of local governments in meeting their citizens' needs by: (i) enabling citizens to benchmark their local government's performance and advocate for improvement; and (ii) creating constructive competition and promoting learning among local authorities.

Approach: Citizens are at the heart of Viet Nam's development. As 'end users' of public administration and public services they are fully capable of assessing the performance of the State and local authorities and supporting the State in establishing a State that is "of the people, by the people and for the people.

Beneficiaries:

·   Vietnamese citizens

·   63 provincial governments (including Provincial Party Committees, People's Committees and People's Councils) and their district and commune affiliates

·   Relevant central agencies (the Viet Nam Communist Party, the National Assembly and the Government of Viet Nam and its ministries)

·   The media, mass organizations and civil society organizations

·   The research community in Viet Nam and abroad

·   The international community in Viet Nam and abroad

What PAPI measures: Eight dimensions (listed below), 29 sub-dimensions, more than 120 indicators, and more than 500 substantive questions about Viet Nam's policy matters covering:

1.   Participation at local levels

2.   Transparency in local decision-making

3.   Vertical accountability towards citizens

4.   Control of corruption in the public sector

5.   Public administrative procedures

6.   Public service delivery

7.   Environmental governance

8.   E-Governance

Method: Face-to-face and video-call interviews for a duration of 45-60 minutes per interview on average

Sampling: International state-of-the-art methodological standards: probability proportional to size (PPS) and random selection of respondents using Viet Nam's population census data 2009 (2010-2020) and 2019 (2021 onward)

Where: Across all 63 provinces and municipalities in Viet Nam since 2011, covering:

·   208 districts (including 64 capital districts and PPS-sampled districts)

·   416 communes (including district-seated communes and PPS-sampled communes)

·   832 villages (including commune-seated villages and PPS-sampled villages)

Who: 178,243 citizens from all demographic backgrounds interviewed since 2009

·   2022: 16,117 (52.6% women; 7.36% migrants)

·   2021: 15,833 (52.11% women; 6.58% migrants)

·   2020: 14,732 (53.5% women)

·   2019: 14,138 (52.5% women)

·   2018: 14,304 (52.05% women)

·   2017: 14,097 (52.6% women)

·   2016: 14,063 (54.8% women)

·   2015: 13,955 (54.1% women)

·   2014: 13,552 (52.9% women)

·   2013: 13,892 (52.7% women)

·   2012: 13,747 (52.6% women)

·   2011: 13,642 (52.9% women)

·   2010: 5,568 (30 provinces; 47.5% women)

·   2009: 543 (3 provinces; 40.3% women)

Samples representative of all ethnicities in Viet Nam since 2010

·   2022: Kinh 84.5%; Non-Kinh 15.5%

·   2021: Kinh 84.77%; Non-Kinh 15.23%

· 2020: Kinh 84.4%; Non-Kinh 15.6%

· 2019: Kinh 84%; Non-Kinh 16%

· 2018: Kinh 84.54%; Non-Kinh 15.5%

· 2017: Kinh 83.5%; Non-Kinh 16.5%

· 2016: Kinh 83.7%; Non-Kinh 16.3%

· 2015: Kinh 83.9%; Non-Kinh 16.1%

· 2014: Kinh 83.9%; Non-Kinh 16.1%

· 2013: Kinh 84.6%; Non-Kinh 15.4%

· 2012: Kinh 84.4%; Non-Kinh 15.6%

· 2011: Kinh 84.5%; Non-Kinh 15.5%

· 2010: Kinh 85%; Non-Kinh 15%

Implementing partners:

· United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

· Centre for Community Support and Development Studies (CECODES)

· Centre for Research and Training of the Viet Nam Fatherland Front (VFF-CRT)

· Real-Time Analytics (RTA)

· Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (HCMA) (in follow-up qualitative research and advocacy activities)

Co-funding partners:

· The Government of Australia (2018-2025)

· The Government of Ireland (2018-2021)

· United Nations Development Programme (2009-2025)

· The Government of Switzerland (2011-2017)

· The Government of Spain (2009-2010)

Information gateway: Website: www.papi.org.vn

Twitter: @PAPI_Vietnam

Facebook: www.facebook.com/papivn

YouTube: www.youtube.com/user/PAPIVietNam

ANNEX VII: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This MTR was conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNEG 'Ethical Guidelines for MTR'. The consultant has safeguarded the rights and confidentiality of information providers, interviewees, and stakeholders through measures to ensure compliance with legal and other relevant codes governing collection of data and reporting on data. The consultant has also ensured security of collected information before and after the MTR and protocols to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of sources of information where that is expected. The information knowledge and data gathered in the MTR process is solely used for the MTR and not for other uses with the express authorization of UNDP and partners.